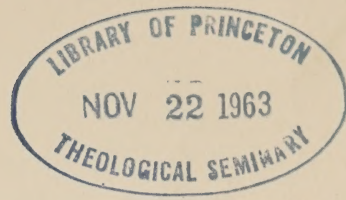


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Karl Barth's theological
method



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Karl Barth's Theological Method



Karl Barth's
Theological Method

By GORDON H. CLARK

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND
REFORMED PUBLISHING COMPANY

PHILADELPHIA

PENNSYLVANIA

1963

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By the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 62-12648

Printed in the United States of America

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A Anselm: *Fidens Quaerens Intellectum*
 John Knox Press, 1960
- D. C. Deliverance to the Captives
 Harper & Brothers, 1961
- D. O. Dogmatics in Outline
 Philosophical Library, 1949
- H. G. The Humanity of God
 John Knox Press, 1960
- K. G. The Knowledge of God
 Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939
- P. T. Protestant Thought: From Rousseau to Ritschl
 Harper & Brothers, 1959
- W. G. The Word of God and the Word of Man
 The Pilgrim Press, 1928
- No symbol: Church Dogmatics
 T. & T. Clark, 1936 ff.

Karl Barth's Theological Method

I

INTRODUCTION

Karl Barth is indisputably a theologian of major importance; he may eventually prove to have been the greatest theologian of our era. Helmut Gollwitzer offers this praise: "Since the time of the Reformation no evangelical theologian has yet won such attention from the side of Roman Catholic theology as Barth has. His work has created a new situation for Evangelical-Catholic dialogue. The development of the ecumenical movement is as unthinkable without his work as the Christian opposition to National Socialism in Germany, as well as the multiform arrangements of Christians and Churches with communism in the eastern nations . . ." (*Karl Barth: Kirchliche Dogmatik*, p. 8).

In answer to the opinion that others are already eclipsing him, G. C. Berkouwer wrote, "The judgment expressed at various times that its [Barth's theology] influence has passed the high water mark is unmistakably being contradicted by the present theological situation" (*The Triumph of Grace*, p. 9). Although this was written before Bultmann's current popularity reached our shores, it is premature to dismiss Barth as a flash in the pan. Barth is a great theologian.

Therefore no critic need now anxiously justify an attempt to study Barth's thought. Of course, many others have carefully expounded and criticized his ideas until the public may wonder whether there

remains anything further to say. There does. So far insufficient notice has been taken of Barth's theological method. Particular points of doctrine, such as the knowledge of God, the Totally Other, the doctrine of Creation, Berkouwer's triumph of grace, have been studied at length in books and periodicals; but Barth's underlying philosophy, his notion of apologetics, the relation of theology to science, Barth's own statements of methodology have received scant attention. To be sure, discussions of specific points of doctrine frequently refer to methods, as also a discussion of methodology inevitably includes some points of doctrine; but no work hitherto published gives the detailed analysis that Barth's first volume of *Church Dogmatics* deserves.

Then, too, regardless of the many excellent studies already published, another one can find its place by virtue of its evaluation and point of view. The present study is indeed an exposition of Barth's philosophic orientation, but it is mainly an evaluation. It accepts and it rejects; it aims to correct and improve; it makes bold to offer its own proposals. Accordingly, since evaluations depend on their authors' principles, the standpoint of the present work may well be made explicit at the beginning.

Four Standpoints

In the first place a study could be conducted from the standpoint of American fundamentalism. Some ecclesiastics would not appreciate this basis of criticism, but Barth himself might not be completely averse to it. There is a certain reasonableness in viewing Barth from this perspective. For one thing, Barth's policy is inclusive: he wants all Christians to take part in theological dialogue—and the fundamentalists are Christians, are they not? Then, further, fundamentalism is violently opposed to modernism. Barth is hardly less opposed: he even dares to brand modernism with the horrid name of heresy. The fundamentalists therefore might welcome Barth as an ally. If they have a common enemy, a fundamentalist critique of Barth would doubtless proceed to enquire whether they have any positive doctrines in common. It would of course begin with its customary criteria. Although not all modernists denied the deity of Christ, some did; and a fundamentalist would rejoice to note that Barth, speaking of Jesus and the New Testament phrase, "Jesus is

Lord," writes, "This man is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, is the Creator, is God himself" (D.O. p. 85). And on a later page he says again, "Jesus Christ is God himself" (D.O. pp. 96-97).

Not to mention certain other favorite themes of fundamentalism, such as the vicarious Atonement and the bodily Resurrection of Christ, the Virgin Birth is an item virtually monopolized by the despised fundamentalists these past fifty years. For some reason or other the modernistic tendency, whether or not in individual cases it went so far as to deny the Atonement and the Resurrection, ordinarily began, in American pulpits if not in Europe, with a rejection of the "biological" miracle of the Virgin Birth. On this point Barth stands firmly, or at least for an Introduction let us say that he seems to stand firmly, with the fundamentalists. He even sees in modernism's rejection of the Virgin Birth one of the several causes of the "increasing barbarism, tedium, and insignificance of modern Protestantism" (I 1, p. xi).

Barth does not mention the Virgin Birth in any merely incidental way. He devotes a fairly long section to its discussion. (I 2, pp. 172-202). There are some replies to the usual objections: the brevity of the New Testament references is not a good objection because all (two) accounts of Jesus birth and childhood contain it; and if Paul does not mention it, it is because he was mainly explaining the Atonement. Nor can one claim that it is an importation from or imitation of similar stories in Greek mythology. The stories are not similar and the Virgin Birth has no parallels. To disdain it as a "biological" miracle, as Brunner does, is to forget that the Resurrection is also a biological, or at least a physical and temporal, miracle. If we give up the Virgin Birth, we must also reject the empty tomb. But Barth's main point, which he enforces at length, is that the Virgin Birth is a necessary and essential element of the Incarnation. If we are to understand it, we must see its "inward essential rightness." In excluding human paternity it excludes all human initiative and "eliminates the last surviving possibility of understanding the *vere Deus vere homo* intellectually, as an idea or an arbitrary interpretation in the sense of docetic or ebionite Christology. It leaves only the spiritual understanding of the *vere Deus vere homo*, i.e., the understanding in which God's own work is seen in God's own light" (p. 177).

But to cut this short: fundamentalism with its great interest in

the details of specific doctrines obviously provides an intelligible and justifiable standpoint from which to study an enumerable list of Barthian items. Nevertheless, fundamentalism is not the precise standpoint on which this present work is based. Fundamentalism, at least the American variety, is too pervasively Arminian; and its great attachment to a few important doctrines has produced a disinterest in other matters equally important. Of course, doctrinal particularities ought not and will not be completely ignored.

Inescapably Barth's arguments on the Virgin Birth will be examined, and no implication that this belief is unimportant will be allowed; but the interest centers in Barth's theological method. One must determine whether the method is workable, whether in this case it justifies Barth's conclusion that the Virgin Birth exhibits a necessary rightness, and whether in other cases it is equally applicable. Thus whatever may be the doctrinal details that come into view, the purpose will be to clarify the controlling concepts, to expose the underlying philosophy, and to evaluate his dogmatic method as a permanent contribution to theology.

A second position from which to investigate Barth, and all investigation that goes beyond insipid repetition must be based on one position or another, is that of fundamentalism's deadly enemy—modernism. This is an especially legitimate standpoint for a critic because Barth has much more to say against modernism than he has in favor of fundamentalism. Opposition to liberal theology permeates the *Church Dogmatics*. Nearly everything in those eight and nine hundred page volumes seems to be consciously directed against the immanentism, the optimism, and the humanism of nineteenth century Protestantism. Modernists cannot possibly evade Barth's polemic against them; they must answer it from their own standpoint. But modernism is even less the standpoint of the present work than is fundamentalism, for it is on this issue that the writer finds his greatest area of agreement with Barth. And so important is Barth's attack on modernism that it cannot be dismissed with a paragraph in the Introduction. It must be given a complete chapter, right at the start; for this material discloses Barth's most fundamental principles, and without an awareness of the theses he is opposing, a reader is sure to misunderstand much of what Barth says.

The third, also a very important standpoint from which criticism of Barth may proceed, is that of Roman Catholicism. In fact, it is

from this quarter that the most reputable and comprehensive works on Barth have come. Barth himself acknowledges a Roman Catholic, Hans Urs von Balthasar, to be the most penetrating of his critics (H.G. p. 44). There are also the ample and solid volumes of Henri Bouillard. As will soon be made clear, the present work does not favor the Roman Catholic position; yet, as with modernism, though to a lesser degree perhaps, a large section of Barth's material cannot be understood without considerable discussion of scholastic themes. One of Barth's insistent claims is that the natural theology of Thomism undermines Christianity; conversely, repudiation of all natural theology and the sole reliance of the Reformed faith in revelation is essential. In introducing his Gifford lectures (1937-1938) he explains his inability as a Reformed theologian to meet directly the conditions set by Lord Gifford. Those conditions required the construction of a theology "without reference to or reliance upon any supposed special, exceptional, or so-called miraculous revelation." At the end of the volume Barth again repudiates this procedure (K.G. pp. 3, 244). The *Church Dogmatics* gives his reasons at length.

Although the rejection of natural theology is a cause and consequence of Barth's method, and his method is the subject of the present volume, the details of Roman Catholic philosophy will be avoided as much as possible. The present writer largely agrees with Barth on the matter of method, even if he also dares to suggest substantial alterations; but the desired points can be made positively without an extensive refutation of Thomism.

The repudiation of natural theology and the reference to the Reformed Faith just above bring into view the fourth and final standpoint from which a critic may evaluate Barth. This Calvinistic standpoint has two definite advantages over the other three; namely, it is the standpoint of Barth himself, and it is the standpoint of the present writer. That it is Barth's position makes it peculiarly fitting as a basis of criticism; that it is the author's makes it a necessity in this case. Barth clearly claims to be Reformed. He frequently refers to his theology as Evangelical; and when Lutheranism is chiefly in view, he explicitly uses the term Reformed. Documentation to show to what extent this claim is justified will be provided in the chapter on modernism, and the question of deviations will recur in the later analyses.

Coincidence of standpoints, however, is not without some disadvantage too. Consider the procedure of three critics as they analyze an obscure passage, of which there are all too many in Barth. Each critic will give Barth the benefit of the doubt, but the direction of the benefit depends on the critic's standpoint. The Thomist will assume that the obscurity indistinctly favors Thomism; and he will not, by forcing a Kantian or Hegelian interpretation upon it, use it as a basis of opposition. For the same reason the modernist will minimize the Thomistic element and read into it his own Hegelian philosophy. Now, Thomism and Roman Catholic theology are rather obviously different from modernism, and the procedure of the two critics is easily observable. Although the result is to give divergent interpretations to the same passage, the reader recognizes the honesty of the procedure. A modernist must not make Barth too Thomistic or too Calvinistic for the purpose of attacking him, and the Roman Catholic must not make him too liberal. Each must in fairness give him the benefit of the doubt.

But when a Reformed critic faces the same passage, at least in those cases where he is inclined to make some negative judgment, his honesty is not so evident. The difference between the critic's conception of what Calvinism requires at such and such a point and Barth's conception is not nearly so obvious as the difference between Calvinism and either of the other two positions. Therefore when the Calvinist gives Barth the benefit of the doubt, he runs a greater risk of being charged with distorting Barth's meaning. Nonetheless he can proceed on no other principle. He must assimilate obscurities and ambiguities to his own conception of Calvinism and base his negative criticism only on the clearest evidence. Berkouwer is particularly successful in this. If other principles are followed, the result may range from the slightly arbitrary to the completely grotesque. To avoid all this in detail is not so easy as it seems in principle. There are difficulties.

A Critic's Difficulties

A brief statement here concerning typical difficulties encountered in studying Barth will forewarn the reader of what to expect. The first of these is the change in Barth's own views.

During World War I Barth broke with the liberalism and idealism

in which he had been educated. Thurneysen, Gogarten, and Merz were also disillusioned and with Barth founded the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Brunner and Bultmann helped. Karl Heim was a little older and a bit aloof; Tillich was quite independent. Eventually this collaboration ran into a snag. Although they had all seemingly repudiated modernism, Gogarten wanted, or seemed to want, to base human knowledge of God on an independent anthropology. Barth would have none of this; and when Brunner tended to side with Gogarten, the group broke up, *Zwischen den Zeiten* ceased publication, and Barth wrote a somewhat violent *Nein!* in reply to Brunner. Each side claimed that the other had deserted their original common principles. Most probably this group did not enjoy so detailed an agreement as they all thought. But however this may be, Barth changed and has never ceased to change. Whether he deserted his own early principles or merely applied them to an ever-widening area of interest, whether the seeming retractions are merely verbal or actually material, are questions for careful analysis. But undoubtedly Barth has changed.

His repudiation of the liberalism in which he had been trained finds early expression in the works up to and including the first edition of his *Epistle to the Romans*. In these some of his later ideas are found in an anticipatory form. The second edition of the *Romans*, completely rewritten, goes far beyond these anticipations; and it is here that the mature and fully independent Barth effectively presented himself to the world. For many years this is what was known as Barthianism. But Barth himself continued to change: not a sudden and sweeping change, not the crystalization of a new set of ideas, but nonetheless a distinct development away from some of the emphases in the *Romans*, until finally there is not a great amount of this dialectical theology left, at least on the surface.

In one of his later books Barth confesses that the phrases "Wholly Other," "infinite qualitative distinction," "tangent," and the like, on which his popularity depended, were unfortunate because they stressed the deity and transcendence of God at the expense of God's *humanity*; i.e., "God's relation to and turning toward man" (H.G. p. 37). In the same book he also retracts his early repudiation of ethics as a "sickness unto death." Then too the *Church Dogmatics* contains a number of short notes in which he likewise amends his earlier phraseology, and a few excursuses of considerable length where,

as a result of the critical reception accorded to previous writings, he makes substantial alterations. Some of the minor changes cause no particular difficulty; but others, such as those just mentioned, concern ideas that were so deeply embedded in Barth's thought that no verbal excision can guarantee freedom from the type of philosophy they represent. It is necessary therefore seriously to raise the question of Barth's consistency, not just through the list of his many writings, but within the *Church Dogmatics* itself.

A second difficulty that every critic encounters is Barth's language—not so much the erudite language of a learned professor as the exuberant language of a prophetic spirit, a dynamic seer, a modern oracle. A Roman Catholic complains, "One must also say that the abundance of words, a style that is often oratorical, certain oscillations of vocabulary, and formulas sometimes insufficiently rigorous do not facilitate the task" of the critic (Bouillard, *Genèse et Evolution*, p. 15). Admittedly, Barth is a profound thinker. But he is also a preacher. He exhorts, he wishes to persuade, he calls for a decision. To this there can be no reasonable objection. If secular thinkers insist that preachers be disinterested, it is only because secular thinkers use this method to convince their public of the truth of secularism. However, all the while admitting and even insisting on the legitimacy of exhortation, one must recognize that the language of the pulpit is usually more literary than the language of scholarship. The preacher uses figures of speech. These are not necessarily exaggeration, nor need they take unfair advantage of absent opponents; but the terminology is not precise. Of course, this is true of all of us in our ordinary conversation. No one can reproach the preacher on this score. But in reading Barth, the preacher-professor, it is sometimes difficult, very difficult, to distinguish what is precise from what is exuberant.

Let us take an example or two. Barth writes, "Jesus Christ is *Kurios*. What does that mean? It means that he is *the great change* in man's life . . . Jesus Christ is this change in man's life" (K.G. pp. 94 ff.). In this section it is clear that Barth is not redefining concepts as some theologians have done. The more advanced liberals have claimed to salvage orthodox values by redefining the terms. Thus, denying an historical resurrection and a transcendent God, they claim to have preserved the real meaning by reinterpreting the resurrection as the continuance of human values from generation to genera-

tion and God as that character of physical events on which our happiness depends. Now, obviously, when Barth says that Jesus *means* or *is* a change in a man's life, he is not engaged in the tawdry game of deception by reinterpretation. He cannot possibly be understood as denying the personal, historical existence of Jesus in Palestine around the years A.D. 1 to 30. Here his language is so obviously imprecise, and in other places he mentions the place and the date, that we cannot mistake it. But there is a middle ground between extravagant hyperbole and literal exactitude where it is difficult to tell on which side the true meaning falls. Even where the language is clearly extravagant, it is ordinarily difficult to tell what precisely it means. Barth denies that he is an existentialist; but it is not clear that he has completely escaped its influence. Sometimes therefore it is problematical whether or not he has "existentialized" an orthodox concept. "To expect him as our judge," he says, "means to believe in him *today*" (K.G. p. 100). What shall we make of this? Should we understand it as saying, 'To expect him as our judge *implies* or *presupposes* that we believe in him today'? Or, is Barth existentializing the pictorial representation of a final Judgment into the present reality of believing in him today?

What is worse, Barth denies that he is rhetorical, when in fact he plainly is. He writes, "The Scottish Confession presupposes that Jesus Christ is our life, and we also, in accordance with all we have so far learnt from it, will likewise have to presuppose this—and do so in no rhetorical sense but in all seriousness and in reality" (K.G. p. 140). Now, Christ may be the Prince of our life, the cause of our life, and his glory may be the end of our life; but it is rhetoric and not literal statement to say that Jesus Christ is our life.

Under the classification of oratory and rhetoric come sweeping negative statements that cry out for qualification. Sometimes the qualification, amounting to a reversal, comes a hundred pages later, after the reader has gone ahead that distance in his natural misunderstanding. Maybe sometimes the qualification never comes along. For example, "The commands and prohibitions of the second table are not to be understood any more than those of the first as the demand for a particular morality or for exceptional achievement . . . Christianity is not morality. We are not intended to be benefactors or instructors, much less gods to one another. In doing this we are simply doing the one thing most natural for those chosen and saved

in Jesus Christ" (K.G. p. 134). Perhaps in one sense of the word *natural* the last sentence of this quotation is true; but must not the preceding be judged false? Can anyone seriously maintain that the Ten Commandments do not require a particular morality? Do they not demand, especially in the light of Christ's interpretation of them, an exceptional achievement? And if we are not to be gods to one another, can it be said that we are not intended to be benefactors to one another? Here Barth's enthusiasm has surely pushed him too far.

In these sweeping negatives Barth shows a singular felicity for saying what he cannot possibly mean. This habit in large part motivated Brunner's *Nature and Grace*, which in turn provoked the too emphatic *Nein!* To quote again from Bouillard (*ibid.*, p. 19), "His formulas, eloquent and paradoxical seem more than once to exclude the complementary truth," not only in his early *Romans*, but in the *Church Dogmatics* as well. Take for example the assertion that "We cannot give God a name as we do to creatures" (II 1, p. 59). Now possibly there is some phase of giving names to creatures which is inapplicable to God. But independently of Barth, would we not say that it is also true that we can give a name to God as we do to creatures? Do we not call him Lord, Father, Jehovah, and Ancient of Days? Is there not therefore, in naming God, a similarity to the naming of creatures as well as some dissimilarity that Barth may have in mind? The assertion of a dissimilarity does not imply the denial of some other point of similarity. What is worse, an assertion of dissimilarity does not indicate what the dissimilarity is. Such phrases are not informative and give rise to varying and uncertain interpretations. Such vagaries, unfortunately, are not peculiar to Barth. They are all too common in religious expression. Evangelists urge people to come forward if they desire a "new" experience of Jesus Christ. But in a literal sense every experience of anything is a new experience. Surely the enthusiastic evangelist does not want his audience to seek a new experience of Christ's displeasure! When now Barth says that we cannot name God "as" we name creatures, the only positive statement he makes in this place—in another place (II 1, p. 195), he says more, but nothing more positive—regarding the name of God is that we must use the name that God has revealed to us, "the name which he gives himself." The idea seems to be that we can invent names for animals, or that Adam did so, and perhaps

that we could call a sheep a zebra. We cannot thus invent a name for God. But then is this not true also of human beings? Must we not call them by the name they give themselves? Perhaps Barth, if he were patient enough to follow this carping criticism, might reply, No, their names were given to them by their parents: they do not give themselves names as God does. But sometimes people go to court and legally give themselves names. Then what? Then it becomes evident that our discussion has led us far from Barth's original intention, that even his reply is not quite to the point, and that we are not sure at all what Barth's point really was.

Is this actually carping criticism? It may seem so because the examples are not theologically important. They are rather trivial; but that was the reason for choosing them as introductory samples of obscure language. When, however, some important theological point depends on the interpretation of similar obscurities, the analysis will not seem captious and the perplexity will be real enough. Perhaps something of more importance needs to be sampled even here in this Introduction. Barth writes, "The Word of God is uncreated reality, identical with God himself, therefore not universally present and fixable, nor possibly so" (I 1, p. 180). Here the term *fixable* is obscure, but otherwise the negative sentence says, though it is hard to believe that Barth means it, that God is not omnipresent. Yet, on the other hand, this may be precisely what Barth means. Does he not exalt the transcendence of God? Does he not in sharpest fashion separate God from the world? Does he not oppose every hint of immanence? Then it might follow that God is not omnipresent. How shall the critic interpret this passage? Shall he run the risk of being thought unperceptive, incapable of discerning the implication of an unambiguous statement, blind to the profundity of Barth's thought? Or, shall he face the charge of unimaginative literalism that has no appreciation of rhetorical style?

In addition to oratory and sweeping negatives, which tempt the critic to wander without directions, there are instances of contradictory assertions. If indeed they are not contradictory pairs, at least they seem to be such at first sight. In one place Barth asserts unqualifiedly that God cannot be known, comprehended, or even apprehended. In another he allows us a true knowledge of God which involves a real human viewing and conceiving (II 1, pp. 187, 341).

Consider also the difficulty encountered in the following passage.

Barth is discussing the question of canonicity (I 2, pp. 479-480). Among other things, he wishes to criticize the position of seventeenth century Protestantism as extreme. It was wrong, he says, to insist that the Church can never alter the Canon, either by addition or subtraction. "We cannot definitely reject the fact that the Church does establish the divine authority of the Scripture contained within this or that limit. In this question of the Canon we cannot ascribe to the Church the role of a mere witness and spectator, however honorable." Then within less than a page he adds, Protestant orthodoxy "had every right to contend for the seven antilegomena in opposition to Luther . . . But it had no right to overlook and suppress the basic significance of the fact that in the sixteenth century the Canon had proved to be an uncertain quantity . . . It had no right to make the Church take up any other position in relation to the Canon (in flagrant contradiction with its own accusation of the Roman Church) than that of a witness and spectator." What then is Barth's position? Is the Church a mere witness and spectator, or is it not?

The occurrence of such inconsistencies, and it is hard to believe that they are all merely apparent, imposes a burden on the interpreter. Not always, but often enough, it is possible that one critic should choose as Barth's real meaning one series of these contradictory pairs, while another critic could choose the other series. Thus two widely different impressions of Barth can be given. No doubt the situation is not so desperate as this at first sounds, for more often than not it is much more reasonable to select one side of the contradiction than the other. Still there remains a considerable amount of uncertainty to provide room for justifiable differences of opinion.

In addition to these difficulties of interpretation there is, finally, a problem of quotation. With some authors this is not very bothersome; but Barth's sentence structure is often complex and he frequently combines two or more ideas where the critic would prefer to discuss only one of them. To quote the complete sentence or complete passage would doubtless be very honest and scholarly, but it would also be a lengthy and distracting procedure. Admittedly a quotation is to be understood only in its immediate and its more extensive context. At the same time it is legitimate to omit phrases and even qualifying clauses, if the omission does not alter the sense of the point under discussion. A critic must choose between distract-

ing his readers with unnecessary ideas and risking misinterpretation by the omission of necessary qualifications. Here the risk will be run.

The Word of God

Barth's voluminous works cover the entire range of theological subject matter. As has been said, most of this will be passed over and attention will be centered on the method, the axioms, and the procedures by which the theological content is obtained and defended. This covers the relationship between theology and secular learning, therefore the role and nature of apologetics, along with the general question of religious knowledge and language, the source of religious authority, and the nature of revelation, as well as an evaluation of Barth's success in his great undertaking.

Among the various names given to Barth's system of thought, e.g., dialectical theology, theology of crisis, and Neo-orthodoxy, is that of the theology of the Word. This one is doubtless the best of these descriptive phrases, for Barth stresses the Word of God. In the Word, in revelation, and not in any independent anthropology or the like, Barth locates the source of religious authority. The Word, then, is the substantial core of Barth's theological method; it is the Logos or logic which governs his thought. Is the method tenable? Is Barth's construction consistent? Is his Logos logical?

II

MODERNISM

In assessing the theology of Karl Barth a chapter on modernism must come first because—with one exception to be mentioned later—he attacks liberalism incessantly, point by point, all the way through. His whole position, in fact, may be described, negatively but very aptly, as a total rejection of modernism.

Barth, however, did not start out in life as an opponent of modernism. His father, first a pastor in Reitnau and later a professor of Church History and New Testament Exegesis at Berne, is described as a “conservative theologian, but one who belonged to the left wing of the evangelical Church.”¹ The son, Karl, studied in Berne under his father, whose courses interested him immensely. In general conformity with the religious ideas of the turn of the century, the promising student seized upon Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* and accepted ethics as the best defense of religion against the inroads of secular science. Barth next wished to study under Wilhelm Herrmann at Marburg, but his father considered Herrmann too radical. The result was a choice of the more neutral Berlin, with courses under Kaftan, Gunkel, and especially Harnack. After further study at Berne and Tübingen, Barth was delighted finally to have the opportunity to go to Marburg. There, he says, I absorbed Herrmann though all my pores. Herrmann had inherited a theological Neo-Kantianism from Ritschl, modified of course by his own predilec-

¹ Bouillard, *Genèse et Evolution de la Théologie Dialectique*, p. 80.

tions. Behind Ritschl stood the great figure of Schleiermacher, who had originally introduced Kantianism into the stream of Protestant thought. Naturally therefore Barth came to study Schleiermacher. University days were now over and Barth emerged as a typical liberal theologian.

As pastor in the town of Safenwil and in conformity with liberal ideas on social service, he became a Socialist and sponsored industrial legislation. If Barth himself did not explicitly say so, his older associates, Ragaz and Kutter, claimed that socialism would usher in the Kingdom of God while the Church was wasting its time on individual salvation. Then came the War.

The changes that soon took place in Barth's theology were not in the first instance initiated by any intellectual dissatisfaction with liberal ideas. It was rather dissatisfaction or disillusionment with the men who professed liberalism. "One day at the beginning of August of that year (1914) impressed me personally as the day of doom, when ninety-three German intellectuals published their approval of the war-policy of Kaiser Wilhelm and his advisers; among whom to my horror I was compelled to recognize the names of nearly all my theological professors, whom I had heretofore devoutly honored. Confused by their morality, I saw that I could no longer follow their Ethics and Dogmatics, their Biblical expositions and historical constructions. I realized that for me at any rate the theology of the nineteenth century no longer had any future" (H.G. p. 14).

For a socialist and pacifist this reaction was perhaps natural; nonetheless it is somewhat illogical—for a system of theology is not to be refuted by the supposedly dishonorable conduct of even ninety-three professors—and reveals a certain mystical tendency in Barth's nature. Under the very narrow definition of mysticism that he later gives, Barth no doubt rightly claims that he is not a mystic. There remains, however, the possibility that at certain points, certain crucial points, his views may be controlled more by impulse than by logic.

In his 1914 disillusionment Barth read about the pietism, the millennialism, and the divine healing of the early nineteenth century pastor Jean Christophe Blumhardt. From this reading he caught the Biblical, non-socialistic idea of the Kingdom; the necessity for a revelation from on high impressed him; and although he did not immediately renounce liberalism, a slow but far-reaching change began.

The change was indeed far reaching. While American modernists

were successfully ridiculing fundamentalists as heresy hunters, and before the Presbyterian Church excommunicated the conservative scholar J. Gresham Machen without allowing him the simple justice of presenting his defense in court, Barth declared that modernism was a heresy (I 1, pp. 36-38). Not only does he repeatedly designate modernism as heresy, but in one place, speaking no doubt of one element in modernism rather than the whole, he has the extreme boldness to say, "The final and almost unavoidable logic of this solution would be the *damnable confusion and blasphemy*: that God is the neighbor, the neighbor is God" (I 2, p. 403). Strong words, these, against the opponents of fundamentalism.

However rhetorical Barth may be at times, one should not regard these charges merely as strong language. Barth makes very clear the serious nature of heresy. He insists that great caution is required before making such a charge. A new theological error, one never before proposed, cannot be termed a heresy until the Church itself condemns it. It is just as serious a matter to decide what is a heresy as what shall be a new creedal statement. He quotes Polanus' definition of heretics as "disguised enemies of Christ and the pure church, who fight against Christ under his own name." Barth rejects the attempt "to interpret the notion of heresy in a less stringent way than that suggested here. But this very understanding of heresy must be a warning against a careless use or arbitrary application of the term where it is not demanded or authorized by a decision of the Church itself" (I 2, pp. 811-812). Surely then Barth must have excellent reasons for repeatedly asserting that modernism is heresy. No personal disillusionment at the conduct of a body of professors could possibly justify such an accusation. What then is the heresy of liberal theology?

Modernism Exalts Man

The basic heresy of modernism, its "damnable confusion and blasphemy," is the substitution of man for God. One might naturally expect radical differences in theology to center in the conception of God. It is here that Buddhism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity differ fundamentally. It is here also that Barth differs from modernism. But the substitution of man for God involves a different conception of man as well as a different conception of God. Modernism

deified man, and it is with the conception of man that Barth's polemics start. The nature of man determines the method of theology. Both Roman Catholicism and modernism assume man's ability by searching to find out God. If man has no such ability, revelation will be necessary. Here lies the perennial problem of the philosophy of religion—man's knowledge of God. Here lies also the question of what God is. Therefore Barth cannot regard liberal theology as merely having blundered on a minor point; he must regard it as nothing less than blasphemy against God.

What now is Barth's substantiation of this serious accusation? What are the effects on theological loci of the liberal habit of "anthropologizing" and of Barth's refusal to do so? And in what manner does Barth propose to return to the Reformation and once again enthrone God? The substantiation, as one may reasonably expect, is extensive. The best method of exposition is first to speak briefly about Schleiermacher, then to refer to the rather general statements with which Barth prefaces his *Church Dogmatics*, and to follow with a number of particularizations.

From the time of his studies with Herrmann, Barth regarded Schleiermacher as the greatest theological figure of the nineteenth century, and not without reason. Convinced of the value of Christianity, Schleiermacher wished to defend it against the onslaughts of the Enlightenment. At the same time he considered himself a modern man. The values of Christianity therefore must in some way be integrated with the advances of science and culture. To do so, he identified the kingdom of God with the progress of civilization. His principles therefore are borrowed from contemporary science. Theology must be founded on a philosophy of religion, and, echoing Kant, religion is to be founded on ethics. With a mixture of Kant and romanticism, Schleiermacher's theology arises in a subjective religious feeling of total dependence. The Word, or intellectual truth, is a secondary matter. It is in feeling, in experience, in conduct that man has some sort of relation with God. By a fortunate contingency¹ a man Jesus experienced this union with God in an extraordinary degree. Thus the purely subjective feeling finds an historical support. Experience and history become as it were the two foci

¹ Did Schleiermacher somewhere compare the coming of Christ with a sharp gust of wind, unexpected, buffeting us, but part of the total phenomena of winds, and therefore not a whit out of the natural course of events?

of an ellipse; but the two foci inevitably draw together until the latter disappears in the former. This means that the union between man and God is a human possibility. It is something that man can do, produce, achieve. Christ becomes a predicate of man. So at least Barth understands Schleiermacher.

Therefore in the Preface to the *Church Dogmatics* Barth writes, "In the line Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Herrmann, and in any thinkable continuation of this line, I can only see the plain destruction of Protestant theology and the Protestant Church" (I 1, p. x). "Should I rather weep," he continues on the next page, "over the constantly increasing barbarism, tedium, and insignificance of modern Protestantism, which has gone and lost—apparently along with the Trinity and the Virgin Birth—an entire third dimension (let us say it once for all, the dimension of mystery—not to be confused with religiously moral 'seriousness') . . ."

This is of course a very general statement; but the specifications are not slow in appearing. For Barth one of the antecedents of modernism was pietism. Though ostensibly orthodox in its acknowledged doctrines, it minimized them in favor of religious experience. It urged an earnest effort after personal conversion, by which exhortation it made faith "a determination of human reality," i.e., an effect of human effort. This subjectivizing of Christianity, while originally tied to a Christian consciousness, became in rationalism an appeal merely to "a religiousness in general." Then when "Schleiermacher as a theologian wished only to speak of what was 'the inmost motive of my being,' out of 'an irresistible inner necessity of my nature,' " Anselm's and Luther's sense of faith "was utterly lost to view." And with a contemporary application Barth concludes that we need to recover "the pre-pietistic doctrine of the theological *habitus*, in virtue of which the theologian is what he is by the grace of God, quite apart from his greater or less connection with Christ-bearing and without the slightest need for existential screaming and the like" (I 1, pp. 21-22).

For the Enlightenment and for modernism the method of theology consists in taking the Church and its faith as part of the wider essential context of civilization in general. "Dogmatics" then becomes a "part of a larger scientific problem-context, from the general structural laws of which we are to read off its special epistemological conditions and to recognize its special scientific claims." This means "a

comprehensively explicated self-interpretation of man's existence, such as will . . . also help at the right moment . . . to a preliminary understanding and criterion of theological knowledge" (I 1, p. 39). Philosophical idealism, with human "feeling" and "immediate self-consciousness" lies at the base of this program. Schleiermacher, and on this Bultmann follows him, first shows the anthropological possibility of faith and second its historico-psychological realizability. "The statements, then, in such prolegomena present themselves, rather, partly as borrowings from metaphysics, anthropology (ethics, according to Schleiermacher), philosophy of religion, and history of religion, partly as pure discussions on methodology. What dogmatic knowledge is, would also be fixable for one who purposes taking no further trouble with dogmatics itself. . . . That the nature of dogmatic knowledge is established outside dogmatics, can only be right in so far as it is actually established outside a definite, in this case Reformed evangelical (also outside Roman Catholic) dogmatics: to be more definite, within modernist dogmatics" (I 1, pp. 40-41).

Schleiermacher claimed that these borrowings from anthropology, ethics, and philosophy were merely Prolegomena and not themselves Dogmatics. His pupil, Alexander Schweizer, acknowledged that this claim is untenable and that the borrowings were in fact the basis of Schleiermacher's system. They are indeed Dogmatics, concludes Barth, heretical Dogmatics, for faith does not develop out of human possibilities.

Before we consider the more technical points of theology, a result on the popular level may be noticed. What sort of weekly preaching does modernistic anthropology require? What kind of sermons does modernism produce? By what criteria does the preacher choose his topic? For it must not be thought that the technical and profound theories of theology have no effect on the daily life of the Church, its ministers, and its members.

The modernist minister has no lack of criteria. He tests his sermon philosophically for its epistemological, logical, and psychological content, or historically, or ethically, or politically. But his criteria are all substitutes for the missing criterion of the Word of God. It might even be that Church proclamation is felt to correspond to the Word of God in proportion as it stands the test of these other criteria. Modernism in its own way was concerned for the Church and wished to preserve the essential values of Christianity while discarding its

historical husks. It had therefore its dogmatics. But it had lost the Reformation's criterion. When, then, other criteria were seized upon to fill the empty place, these were regarded as a full and equal substitute, in a measure representing what had been lost. Even the golden calf was not intended to set forth a strange God, but the God who had led Israel out of Egypt. "In this way we may regard the theology of modernist Protestantism. It had ceased to envisage any possibility of getting within sight of the Word of God as an entity distinct from Church proclamation. But it was very much in sight of other entities, likewise distinct from Church proclamation and likewise very authoritative, comprised in the modern consciousness of being civilized" (I 1, p. 288).

Modernism, however, could not completely ignore the Scriptures. At least in Europe it could not altogether erase the memory of the Reformation. In America, on the other hand, Barth notes that Wilhelm Pauck wrote, "It is important to remember . . . that the difference between modern preaching in America and Protestant Europe is fundamental. The American sermon is seldom Biblical and expository. Its reference to the Scripture is in the majority of cases casual or superficial . . . The European Protestant, however, follows the old tradition of preaching the 'Word,' whether he is affiliated with liberal or orthodoxy theology" (I 1, p. 291). When, now, the Bible is ignored and Christianity is based in general anthropology, however much philosophy or politics is put into the sermon, preaching can only be an expression of the personal piety of the preacher. Man has replaced God. "Modernist thought knows nothing finally about the fact that man in relation to God has constantly to be letting something be said to him, constantly to be listening to something . . . which in no sense he can say to himself . . . In Schleiermacher . . . we are at once told that the 'divine Word' is nothing else than 'the spirit in all men' . . . We find ourselves nowhere else save at the other, the realistic end of the path idealistically entered upon by Schleiermacher, when a century later, according to Paul Tillich, a 'fresh sacramental situation' would have to be 'created' to save Protestantism by 'our success in reaching the depths of our own undivided pre-objective being.' . . . Here too man is thought of as in the long-run conversing purely with himself. And in fact 'religious symbols are created in process of religious history.' 'One has the right to say that, e.g., Christ or Buddha are symbols, so far as the unconditionally

transcendent can be viewed in them' " (I 1, pp. 68-69). Noting that Tillich speaks of 'choosing' symbols, and that in fact he multiplies symbols in art and music to the detriment of preaching, Barth presses the question, Why should one choose this symbol rather than another? Why choose two sacraments instead of seven? And particularly, Why should modernism choose any symbols at all? Why not silence? Proclamation as self-exposition is superfluous.

The difference between the biographical nature of modernistic preaching and Barth's proclamation of the Word of God comes to light in a conversation with A. von Harnack. "In 1925 I had a last direct conversation with him, upon the possibility and problem of an Evangelical dogmatics. He told me that if he had to write such a work himself, this [The Life of the Children of God] would be his title. There is no doubt that if an Evangelical dogmatics did not have to have a special title—and better not—this one could be used. Of course even under this title its basic and decisive theme and center would be the one Son of God and the Holy Spirit, its source would be Holy Scripture, and its locus the Church. And obviously that is not what Harnack meant. His proposal was that dogmatics in the older sense ought now to be replaced by the personal confession of someone who has attained the maturity and serenity of final convictions and spiritual certainties, a confession determined at its very heart by the history of Christianity. For myself, I cannot see that this kind of confession is in any way a real substitute for the function of dogmatics in theology and the Church. Harnack was obviously speaking for Neo-Protestantism, whose proper object of faith is not God in his revelation, but man himself believing in the divine. As it thinks and speaks under Holy Scripture and in the Church, theology cannot ascribe any such value or significance to man" (I 2, pp. 367-368).

And as for the American sermon, Barth can only hope that someday it will become so stupid and stale that somebody will dimly recall that the preaching of the Church ought to have some sort of connection with the Bible (I 1, p. 292).

As was said before, whatever difference there may be between Barth's concept of God and that of modernism, and this will soon be spelled out, the polemical battle takes place mainly on the field of anthropology. The essential humanism of liberal theology is implicit in its view of human nature. This view of human nature is seen in

liberalism's treatment of history. Above it was said that in liberalism experience and history are like two foci of an ellipse, but that they inevitably draw together until history disappears in experience. Barth explains how this occurred. One of the tasks Schleiermacher and some of his predecessors set for themselves was the defense of Christianity against the onslaught of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment had affected a supercilious disdain of history. Antiquity was spurned as being all confusion and superstition. Against this view the liberals of the late eighteenth century professed a respect for the past. The great men of antiquity, Jeremiah and Jesus, Paul and Luther, are fellow men, having with us a common human nature. Admittedly, as the Enlightenment too vigorously insisted, we must criticize them from our higher vantage point; but, said the liberals, we must also esteem them as comrades in our great endeavors. By studying history appreciatively we may come to discern God's revelation. This was a favorite theme of Lessing. He wanted to know how past events could have contemporary relevance. The "foul wide ditch" between the Bible and us, over which he could not jump, was not the problem of historical understanding. Lessing and Herder and Schleiermacher on down to Ritschl and Harnack and Troeltsch could easily jump over the gap of centuries, with excellence and skill. Likewise, Lessing's saying that "accidental truths of history can never prove the necessary truths of reason" is not a banality as though the truths of history are special empirical concrete data and the truths of reason are timeless philosophical axioms. Kant may have meant this, but not Lessing. Lessing recognizes quite well a proof of Christianity by history, but it is "the proof of the Spirit and of power;" i.e., history proves no truth that is merely told to us by others. History proves truth only as felt and experienced by ourselves. Such truths become the necessary truths of reason, necessary and real for us when they are 'felt' as "the paralytic feels the beneficent shock of an electric spark." By such inner truth all Scriptural traditions must be explained; apart from such experiences Scripture cannot give us the truth. This inner truth Lessing holds to be an entity thoroughly accessible to and apprehensible by us; as to its presence we can be the judges in virtue of our feeling and experience. Therefore he appeals from Luther's writings to Luther's spirit, from the letter of the Bible to the spirit of the Bible, from recounted miracles to the still constantly continuing miracle of religion itself, and finally from the

Christian religion to the religion of Christ. Thus Lessing abolished the ditch he could not jump over by asserting an immanent power in human nature by which is discerned the coincidence of revelation and history (I 1, pp. 165-167).

In a later section Barth puts the problem more explicitly. "Are we to assert without reservation," he asks, "that the question of the possibility of knowing the Word of God is a question of anthropology? Are we to enquire into what man in general and as such . . . is or is not capable of in this respect? Is there a general truth with regard to man which would include his capacity for knowing the Word of God? We must put this question because an almost overpowering development in the history of Protestant theology since the Reformation has led to an impressive affirmative to this question throughout the entire movement in the Church which we have described as modernist" (I 1, p. 218). Then in the following excursus Barth remarks that the post-Reformation period in its aversion from a scholastic *nuda speculatio de Deo* sided with Duns Scotus in regarding theology as a practical science and not a theoretical science as Thomas had maintained. The object of theology was no longer the nature and will of God, but rather man in so far as he is led toward eternal blessedness. Turretin was perhaps exceptionally clear-sighted and was suspicious of such definitions. To guard against undesirable inferences he insisted that even so theology was concerned with God, God as revealed in Christ. But perhaps others did not see so clearly as Turretin. From the outset, Barth maintains, Protestant orthodoxy suffered from an excess rather than a defect in considering the religious subject. Under the influence of Renaissance interests, the later theologians began to shift the attention of theology from a Beyond to man himself. This object, man, was then supposed to be understood through the general truths of anthropology, empirically discovered. Simultaneously natural theology revived, as the misgivings of the Reformers in this connection faded. By the eighteenth century theology had become the "science of religion." Schleiermacher quite fundamentally connected this newly discovered and independent reality of religion with a corresponding human possibility generally demonstrable on anthropological grounds, undertaking for the first time to interpret Christianity in the form of a concretely historical analysis of human existence along the lines of a general doctrine of man: to wit, Man's meeting with God to be regarded as a human

religious experience historically and psychologically fixable; and this experience to be regarded as the realization of a religious potentiality in man generally demonstrable. These are the two cardinal propositions in the philosophy of religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The decisive one is naturally the second. Whether the actual anthropology adopted is that of Schleiermacher or one more congenial to contemporary consciousness, like that of Heidegger, the result is still humanistic liberalism. Such is Barth's excursus (I 1, pp. 218-220).

Barth's opposition to basing theology on general anthropology became more pointed as his thought developed. Because of a misunderstanding by or with Gogarten, Barth had to amend, add to, and clarify his previous pronouncements. One of Gogarten's chief criticisms of the first edition of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* was that it lacked an anthropology; he wanted a theory of man which would be the fountain and criterion of all future theological propositions. Thus he read the lesson of history from Luther and the Renaissance on to Schleiermacher. Now aside from the question whether Gogarten had misinterpreted Luther, the anthropology he wanted is harmful because it leads to naturalistic humanism. Not that Gogarten so intended. He was ostensibly interested in relating theology to philosophy in general. He was even willing to grant that "there is no understanding of man without an understanding of God, but . . . this God again I cannot understand, unless I already understand man." Then Barth remarks, "Had Gogarten in the last sentence written 'also' instead of 'already,' no objection could be taken . . . Gogarten actually writes 'already' of man. By this 'already' there appears to be ascribed to understanding man a priority over understanding God." After a page of analyzing the perplexities of Gogarten's terminology, and recalling how he had acutely and emphatically renounced natural theology, Barth asks which side of Gogarten's thought should one take seriously, his anthropological program or his original agreement with Barth? But in any case Barth will have nothing to do with any sort of natural theology. The Biblical view of man in his estate of original righteousness and then as corrupted denies all possibility of reaching God by starting with man. The theologian therefore has no common platform on which to come to terms with the philosopher, be his name Griesebach or Heidegger, "for we know nothing of our created state from our created state, but only through the Word of God . . .

To 'start from man' can only mean to start with man of the lost *status integritatis* . . . Thus to understand God, 'starting from man' signifies either a thing impossible in itself, or one such as can only be described in the form of Christology but not in the form of anthropology" (I 1, pp. 141-149). Here then is a major part of Barth's opposition to modernism, and, insofar as it hints negatively at a Reformed epistemology, an anticipation of some of his most important constructive efforts.

Excursus (in imitation of Barth). Anthropologizing is not restricted to Neo-Protestantism and Barth attacks it wherever it is found.

The same flaw is seen in and the same objection is raised against even Augustine's attempt to discover in man the marks of the Trinity. Luther himself saw the danger, "For he explained that from the Augustinian doctrine of the *imago dei* in man, present in *memoria*, *intellectus*, and *voluntas*, must follow the annoying *disputatio de libero arbitrio*." If God is free, the argument goes, and if man is made in God's image, man also must be free. "The advance of anthropological speculation *via* Descartes and Kant to Schelling and Hegel, and finally to Feuerbach has clearly justified him [Luther] . . . The image of God in consciousness is primarily and without question, in itself and as such, the image of free man. To see in this image as such the image of God is to declare that free man is recognized as God" (I 1, p. 394). And in this way Feuerbach's conclusion that the idea of God is simply man's idea of himself follows logically.

Here a parenthetical warning may not be inappropriate. While Barth is to be commended for his single-mindedness in attacking every anthropological basis of theology, it hardly follows logically that if God is free and if man is made in God's image, man also must be free. If this were a logical implication, the doctrine of the image of God in man would imply that since God is omnipotent man must be omnipotent too. One must therefore first decide in what the image of God consists. However much Reformed theologians rightly oppose Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, and however much Feuerbach may have drawn out the logical conclusions of modernism, Calvinists would hardly be unanimous with Barth in defining the image of God in consciousness, primarily or even secondarily, as the freedom of the will. Perhaps this is one instance where Barth has allowed impulse, essentially a good impulse, to push him beyond logic. We are warned therefore to consider whether or not Barth is always Reformed in his thinking.

Returning to Augustine on the Trinity, Barth continues, "*Vestigia trinitatis* there of course are; no one can deny it. The only question is, of which Trinity? If it is to be the divine Trinity that meets us in the three dimensions of space or in the three notes of a simple harmony or in the three primary colors or even in spring, stream, and lake, then God is—just, as seen

first in ancient Babylon and India, the mysteriously threefold law or nature of the world known to us, the mystery of the cosmos, traces of which meet us in this triplicity of all or many things, and which in that case would be obviously in most intimate touch with the mystery of man and the mystery of his religion."

Barth Exalts God

The preceding documentation has shown that modernism is man-centered. Man's knowledge of God, which upon examination turns out to be knowledge of himself, arises out of the ordinary resources of human nature. Barth's thought, on the contrary, is God-centered, and the following documentation will explain his quite different epistemology. How can man come to know God? The answer is no analysis of the universe, history, or the human spirit. The answer is revelation.

"The simplicity of revealed reality is not that of a repeated or general event, like that of an event formulated in the law of causality. It is the simplicity of a definite, temporarily limited, unrepeated, and quite unrepeatable event . . . There is no anticipation or repetition of this event. The reality of revelation is not a determination of all history or of a part or section of the whole of history. It is history, this very definite history, which has not happened before and will never happen again, which happened once for all, not once in every age or once in many, but quite literally once for all" (I 2, p. 12).

In another place, after further discussion of Gogarten and his anthropology, Barth takes up the objection made against him by the Roman Catholic theologian Przywara. This Jesuit admits that Barth has completely avoided the modernist reduction of God to man, but only to fall into the worse exaltation of man to the level of God by allowing man to participate in a peculiar way in revelation. The objection is rather bizarre, but Barth takes the opportunity to deny all sorts of "correlation theology." Man and God are of course related; but Wobbermin, Winckler, and even Bultmann forget the "free ground" in God on which this relation is based. When man becomes a participant in God's revelation, we must remember that "it is true not as a condition of God which we could fix and assert by starting from the concept of man as participating in his revelation, but as an act, a step, which God makes to meet man, by which the latter first becomes a man participating in his revelation. This be-

coming on man's part is one that is conditioned from without, from God's side, whereas God by making the step by which the whole correlation is first created at all is not conditioned from without, from man's side" (I 1, p. 196).

The assertion of God's transcendence and the denial of a general anthropological capacity in man to know God, two sides of the same coin, works itself out in many applications. Whereas a religion derived from the philosophy of history or from psychological analysis depends on constant universal laws exemplified time after time, the free, spontaneous or gracious act of a transcendent God in making a special revelation to chosen men is an event that has occurred once for all. Such a knowledge of God cannot be obtained by investigating the constant processes of nature. "If we mean by the word 'revelation' 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' then we are asserting something that is to be grounded only within the Trinity . . . Certainly in place of this absolute we may mean something relative by the word 'revelation,' but the Bible means this absolute solely . . . If we say 'God with us,' we mean that which has no ground or possibility outside itself, which can in no sense be explained in terms of man and his situation, but only as knowledge of God proceeding from God, as free undeserved grace. [We] . . . renounce any other foundation save that which God himself has given once for all by having spoken" (I 1, pp. 134-135).

Barth is so insistent that the knowledge of God cannot be obtained from man's natural inner resources that he goes to some length to criticize a view which at first sight seems fairly similar to his own. It is this. Barth not only rejects the possibility of deriving a knowledge of God from any universal human capacity, as Schelling and Hegel had tried to do, but he also attacks the views of Schaeder and Wobbermin, who speak of a special capacity given freely by God to chosen men. This argument starts off from a discussion of the value of personal Christian experience. Some of Barth's critics, their minds occupied with his great emphasis on transcendence, concluded that he allowed no room for any subjective factor in religion. Barth wishes to correct their misapprehension. He does not deny a subjective experience of faith, a personal meeting with God, a meeting in which God changes a man. He has no objection against introducing feelings, conscience, or intellect into this experience. But the description of this experience, later given by the theologian, is not the result of a



psychological study; it is a conclusion from an earlier gained understanding of the Word of God. Barth wants to insist on the reality of such personal experience precisely because he has been charged with putting revelation up in the clouds and with completely eliminating personal faith and conviction. He does not so eliminate it, but his account of personal experience differs from that of the liberals. To repeat, experience of the Word of God is a genuine, humanly possible experience. But it is not an experience in which the state of human possibilities is enriched by the addition of an organ or capacity not previously possessed. Granting that man as such, the Hegelian natural man, is no longer in view, but a chosen man, a forgiven sinner, Barth asks whether such a man possesses a possibility which he may study in himself or which others may study in him? So Schaeder seems to think as he speaks of "a conjunction between the Word of God and the finite Ego," or of a "Word-mediated active synthesis between the spirit of God and the finite spirit," or as he describes the Word of God itself as "having arisen (!) out of the synthesis of divine self-offering or revelation and the human relationship of faith effected by this revelation." Such essentially is the view of Wobbermin also and of Robert Winckler, who designates it as a platform upon which all opponents of Barth may unite. Now, Wobbermin differs from the older liberals in that they assigned a religious capacity to human nature as such, while he insists that the possibility of such an experience is given to man from God's side and only from God's side. Without then depending on some of Schaeder's more extreme statements: to wit, "The God with whom theology has to do is the God of our consciousness and no other; or he is the divine spirit-content of our consciousness . . . The present finite spirit or the personal consciousness is investigated by theology in regard to its possession of God or the divine spirit and the conditions thereof . . .," for both he and Wobbermin acknowledge that the initiative is with God, Barth nonetheless judges their view severely. "But what also seems to hold at first and is asserted on the basis of this theory, the action, creation, or gift of God in the experience of his Word, all at once ceases to hold at a definite point. And what . . . seems at first not to hold . . . man's suitability to the experience in question, nevertheless turns up all at once in full force . . . For the reality of this experience . . . is thought of in such a way that in it God hands something over to man, with the result that practically it passes from the hands of God to the hands of man . . . Man's consciousness now has a 'content

of divine spirit,' a consideration and investigation of which can be carried though . . . There arises in the reality of this experience . . . a new man, new not only in being man addressed by the Word of God . . . but new in himself, transformed in the immanent state of his humanity. The man now gains . . . independence . . . so much so that the introduction of the concept of mysticism, while not indispensable, becomes imminent and desirable . . . He no longer stands merely upon the Word of God, but (of course with a constant appeal to the Word of God) also upon himself, upon the conjunction or synthesis realized in him and therefore possible to him, upon the *esse capax verbi dei* imparted to him . . . Can we avoid the snag that man thus characterized . . . is going to discover that he is nearer himself than the Word of God is, that therefore the order of knowledge, Man-God, will come into force anew? . . . Thus in real experience of the Word of God man becomes . . . an independently interesting realization of this experience and thereby also the thing that makes it possible, . . . the first and decisive criterion and measure of it . . . Behind the thesis of Professors Wobbermin and Schaeder . . . stands the common sense of practically the whole of our positive and liberal ministry . . . Tell them . . . that the material order regarding experience of the Word of God must run God-man and not *vice versa*, . . . tell them . . . further that for man generally, man without or before faith, the order of knowledge must also run God-man . . . they will concede your point. But tell them that this order of knowledge holds also and particularly of the religious man, that he also, he precisely, does not possess any possibility—not even as received— . . . tell them that this possibility is and remains God's possibility . . . and at once you stir up angry irreconcilable strife. When we say this . . . we have the crushing majority of leaders and led in the Protestant Church today passionately against us" (I 1, pp. 238-244).

If Barth believes that the difference between Wobbermin and the older liberals is of no importance, we may expect his polemic to continue without further discussion of this last point. Accordingly the next inference from his position as now stated is Barth's reversal of the modernist concepts of possibility and actuality. Behind the discussion of possibility lies a long history of two fundamentally opposed viewpoints. In Plato the world of Ideas as an entity independent of and superior to the Demiurge limits the possibilities that are open to him in fashioning the world of becoming. Philo Judaeus on the other hand put the Ideas in God's mind and subordinated them to

him. In modern philosophy Descartes argued that the actual world is good because and solely because God made it. Leibniz took the opposite view that God created this actual world because it was good, being the best of all possible worlds. He thus assumed principles of possibility and goodness independent of God. In the philosophy of religion there are discussions on man's competence to know God. Some may say *finitum non capax infiniti*; others deny an Unknowable, a *Ding an sich*, and hold that knowledge has no limits. On a more popular level a fundamentalist may assert that God commanded the children of Israel to exterminate the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:3); to which the modernist replies by denying the possibility that a good God would give such an order. Barth may not use this example, but in principle he seems to agree with the fundamentalists. "We must not desire to know *a priori* what goodness is, or to grumble if the world does not conform to it" (D.O., p. 58).

In his *magnum opus* Barth considers the concept of possibility in several different sections. He repeatedly condemns the liberalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for measuring the actuality of divine revelation according to concepts of possibility that were no more than human constructs. By his own examination of man's needs the liberal theologian decided what God could and must do. His faith therefore was based on "the cunning conclusion that God has made out his case in accordance with our well-founded convictions . . . The basic difference between this theology and the theology of older Protestantism is that from some source or other, some general knowledge of God and man, it is known beforehand, known *a priori*, what revelation must be, may be, and ought to be" (I 2, p. 4). But if a man grounds his recognition of revelation on such a human norm, then what he recognizes as revelation has nothing to do with God's revelation—not even if his statements conform to the Bible. Even the devil can quote Scripture.

The problem of predicting what God can reveal and do, the problem of measuring the limits of possibility, is profound and perennial. In the past Plato and Leibniz answered without appeal to revelation. They had an Idea of Good superior to God. In the present Edward John Carnell says, "If the meaning of God's character cannot be anticipated by information drawn from our own conception of decency, what significance is conveyed by the term 'God' " (*Christian Commitment*, p. 138). On the opposite side are Calvin and Barth. Barth goes on to point out that if a theologian accepts a revelation because it

conforms to his "cunning conclusions" or his anticipations of decency, he will lack theological stability. "In that case it [his theology] may equally well take another form at any moment," since the theologian may discover mistakes in the application of his norm, or even come to accept another norm. "The same judge who is satisfied with God today may no longer be so tomorrow." But it is presumption to claim the right to say Yes or No to God merely because we are satisfied or dissatisfied, merely because an identified revelation conforms to an arbitrary concept derived from ordinary experience. "In such considerations we put ourselves, so to speak, midway between God and man, with a twofold illusion and assumption, the claim to know what God can and must do, to know what is necessary and appropriate to us men so that revelation between him and us can become an event. This illusion and assumption will certainly betray itself when the second element, our claim to know our own needs and possibilities, is openly or secretly put forward as the compass and measure of the first, our claim to know the divine possibilities or necessities. In such circumstances it is inevitable that even the most conscientious theology will prescribe for God what his revelation must be and how it must be handled, if he is to count upon our recognition of it as such" (I 2, p. 3). This view denies freedom to God: God is forced to conform to non-revealed concepts—otherwise he would not be doing his duty to man! Does this not entail a superiority of man over God? As Feuerbach so clearly showed, this sort of theology creates God in man's image and man is found to be worshiping himself.

The opposite view, which is the method prescribed by Holy Scripture, is that God's act of revelation is free. God is in no way bound to man. That is why the language of the prophets and apostles is not a selective treatment of well-founded convictions, but, something quite different, a witness. It is an answer to something spoken to them, an account of what they have heard. "That is why their conception of what is possible with God is guided absolutely by their conception of what God has really willed and done, and not *vice versa*" (I 2, p. 7).

The Concept of God

The exposition has now made clear that modernism is man-centered and that Barth's theology is God-centered. The subject-matter, however, has been epistemological, for this indeed is Barth's empha-

sis. Yet it cannot be obscured that these different epistemologies entail different concepts of God. Barth's God is the God who creates, who loves, who reveals himself, who is therefore a Person. The God of modernism is a derivative of Hegelian Absolutism. Accordingly the next step is to develop and sharpen this antithesis.

As previous references have already hinted, it was Ludwig Feuerbach who argued that absolute idealism, and with it the Christianity he knew, inevitably becomes atheistic realism. Man has made God in his own image. That atheistic realism is not Christian goes without saying; that this is what Hegelianism and modernism lead to requires a little explanation.

First, a brief reference to the doctrine of creation. Christian theologians have commonly pointed out that creation as a voluntary act is incompatible with Hegelian philosophy. Hegel can very sincerely say that the world depends on God or the Absolute, and to this extent he sounds like a Christian; but Hegel continues as no Christian can and adds that the Absolute conversely depends on the world. This mutual dependence is essentially pantheism. No single thing by itself, the sun, the moon, or John Doe, is God; but the whole, not in its plurality but in its unity, is God. God and the universe are one reality. Barth's rejection of this mutual dependence, of this reciprocity between whole and part, is clear cut: "God would be none the less God if he had not created a world and man. The world's existence and our existence is no wise essentially necessary to God, even as the object of his love" (I 1, p. 158).

The concept of love has a particular bearing on God's relation to the world. If God is essentially love, it could seem that necessarily there must have always existed objects of this love. Barth quotes Angelus Silesius:

I know that without me God cannot an instant be.
 He needs must perish at once, were death to come to me.
 God loveth me alone, he holdeth me so dear
 That if I love him not, he dieth of anxious fear.
 Nought is but I and thou, and if we two are not,
 Then God is no more God, and heaven itself is nought.

Barth dubs the poem pious blasphemy and suggests that the Roman Catholic bishop who gave it his imprimatur was an imbecile. God is no doubt one who loves, but only a forced exegesis can take

I John 4:8 as a definition. The context shows that the love John had in mind was manifested by God's sending his Son into the world to be the propitiation of our sins. We are certainly not to take some general concept of love and equate it with God. We are to note what God has done and define love thereby. Other theologians have made the point that God may be eternal love without needing creatures eternally as its objects because the three persons of the Trinity eternally love each other. Barth does not state this clearly, at least not in this section; though one or two vague expressions hint at it. At any rate, "It is not part of God's being and action that as love it must have an object in another who is different from him. God is sufficient in himself as object and therefore as object of his love. . . . God does not owe us either our being, or in our being his love" (II 1, 280-281). Stressing thus the grace and freedom of God, Barth escapes the pantheistic conclusion of an eternal and necessary world.

A slightly later passage still further sharpens the contrast between Barth's concept of God and the liberal idealistic concept. It begins with Barth's denial of the need of a philosophic, abstract translation of Scriptural terms in order to get the real truth about God. "It is not the case then . . . that we have to do with a certain amount of titivation when we adopt the language of Scripture and talk of God, not in abstract terms as the 'highest good' or the 'absolute' or 'omnipotence' or 'omniscience' and the like, but personally as One who is all these things as the knowing, willing and acting I" (II 1, p. 286). God is not to be thought of as "the impersonal absolute, the highest good, the world-spirit, or world cause or the like." Even the incomprehensibility of God does not preclude our assurance on this point. God is a person.

It is interesting to follow Barth's attack (*ibid.*, pp. 287-297) on every view that makes God a neuter. The nineteenth century criticisms of the personality of God may be traced back to their roots in medieval scholasticism. In the common practice of discussing the nature of God before discussing the Trinity, revelation was neglected and an involuntary approach to pagan antiquity began. God was described in superlatives, but in neuter superlatives: *ens perfectissimum*, *summum bonum*, *actus purus*, *primum movens*. Personality was obscured, and the possibility that this God is a Trinity became an insuperable difficulty. Hence scholasticism by making God the Idea of Ideas, the hypostatization of the world of Ideas, is not essen-

tially different from the Enlightenment's reduction of God to the eternal truth of the theoretical and practical reason.

From this follows the Hegelian or post-Hegelian attack against the personality of God. "What a person is was now thought to be known from the knowledge of the self as person. Person is the individual manifestation of the spirit, its individualization, which as such is limited, but contingently necessary. How then could God be a person? . . . How could God be limited?" (II 1, p. 288). *Omnis determinatio est negatio*. To call an object a stone, an animal, or a person is to say that it is *not* something else. But the Absolute is All; it can have no determinations, limitations, or negations. Therefore 'God,' as unlimited, cannot be a person. Said D. F. Strauss, "Absolute personality is a *non ens* which we cannot even conceive."

A further reason, perhaps a deeper reason, why these theologians could not attribute personality to God was that they ascribed it so vigorously to man. What does it matter that man is finite, if as person he can conceive and describe the absolute spirit? Does not such a man fulfill the concept of personal being? Is he not the true knowing and willing I? To know is to control. The infinite, the God who is subject to man's control, obviously cannot be in any way unsettling, menacing, or critical, in spite of man's finitude. Man, the person, is supreme in thought and definition over this infinite. God has become the content of human reason. To predicate personality of this content, i.e., of God, would mean an end to the predicating subject. This predication could only be the recognition of something which precedes all human predication. It would be "the end of the control under which the neutral infinite so comfortably contemplates and governs itself as man's own infinite, realizing itself in the act of his finite personal being . . . The whole advance of the new age, embraced in the equation of God and the idea of reason, was a defense against the destroying of human self-consciousness through the reality or even the mere possibility of a divine self-consciousness materially different. In this destruction there could be discerned only an inrush of primitive barbarity into the preserve of the newly discovered and already self-evident 'religion within the limits of pure reason.'" This Hegelian theology "was irresistibly powerful because it moved in purely analytical statements, because it merely repeated the so-to-speak commonly held presupposition that man is the person who, thinking the idea of his reason, has the power to think God, and that

for this reason, and in confirmation of it, God is to be thought of as absolute and infinite, but cannot under any circumstances be thought of as person and therefore as the superior rival of men" (*ibid.*, p. 290) .

Many attempts have been made to answer this Hegelian theology, but the weakness in all the modern vindications of the personality of God is that they have accepted the same premises. They have assumed a knowledge of man that is independent of revelation. Personality is ascribed to God because the concept of person expresses what is truest and best in human existence. As Siebeck says, "The essence of the personal is projected from experience to the transcendent." The argument of Lotze is, "No other form of being than that of personality can satisfy . . . the longing of the soul to grasp as reality the highest which is given to sense." Similarly Rothe says, it is "a narrow minded delusion to think that we must regard the blessed God as so superior that he must be denied everything that constitutes the peculiar excellences of human nature." Ritschl adds that the recognition of the personality of God discloses "the value which religion asserts for the human spiritual life." Of course the marks of empirical personality all lose their discursive conceivability, and it is clear that these arguments "have a common hypothesis with those who deny the personality of God, namely, that God is to be understood as the content of the highest human values. But on this common ground they cannot hold their own against the criticism levelled from the other side" (*ibid.*, p. 291) .

Long before Lotze and Siebeck, Feuerbach had exposed the modern "God" as the postulation or deification of humanity. He had done so with unmistakable clarity. One must wonder how the later theologians, by their references to the longings of the human heart, the infinite value of human personality, its meaning in history, and their open projection of human self-consciousness into the transcendent, could so naively expose themselves to Feuerbach's arguments.

Let us disregard the technical impossibility of the theologians' defense of divine personality, continues Barth; let us suppose that the eternal spirit has been successfully equated with God, a person, a knowing, willing I, in real difference from the human I. Granted all this, how very disloyal we are to the whole intention of the modern doctrine of God! We now have a human subject who is not opposed by a neutral absolute which can be leisurely surveyed and

mastered, but a divine I endowed with this absoluteness. But this destroys the pantheistic unity of God and the world in man, by which modern consciousness hoped to preserve the values of Christianity. If any of the stupid protagonists of the personality of God had taken seriously the matter with which Lotze and Siebeck only played, if anyone had begun to think that God is the true, speaking, acting person, not on the basis of speculation but on the basis of revelation, there would have been a fundamental revolution in theology at the end of the nineteenth century. But the reaction represented by Lotze could not be effective against modern consciousness because it shared its hypotheses. Lacking power as it did, this reaction was nonetheless a symptom that the recollection of the Biblical conception of God had not completely disappeared, a recollection which produced strange inconsistencies even in D. F. Strauss, and maybe worse ones in A. E. Biedermann.

"There was, then, a constant vacillation between the intention of this [Biblical] concept of God and the modern doctrine of God, or that of pagan antiquity. The one was affirmed, but there was obviously no ability or desire to sustain it. The other was rejected as untrue, yet its presence had still to be taken into account. . . . All this goes to show, as so often in Neo-Protestantism, that it is easy enough to raise trouble and disturbance in the Church by introducing new teaching, but not so easy to break up the Church by raising a consistent counter-doctrine and therefore a counter Church. . . . Today, perhaps, it is to be regarded as an interlude—comparable with Marcionism in the Early Church" (II 1, p. 296).

True it is that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church of God; and it may also be true that modernism is now almost as dead as Marcionism. Yet it is strange, after this slashing attack on damnable heresies, that Barth's optimism in the indestructibility of the Church should lead him at length to depreciate the seriousness of modernism's denials. "There is therefore no more point now in being as angry with its champions as we sometimes are when we lose sight of the inner weakness of the whole affair . . . The dispute about the personality of God then becomes an historical matter. As such it is no doubt very interesting, exciting, and informative. But it is still merely historical."

This refusal to consider the denial of the personality of God a serious matter does not very obviously accord with Barth's constant

exhortations to seriousness. Optimism with regard to the indestructibility of the Church could, on this showing, result in taking nothing seriously. In a later chapter something must be said about Barth's view of the Church and the importance of Church proclamation. Then too it is doubtful if today we ought to dismiss modernism as we dismiss Marcion. Barth himself finds important modernistic assumptions in Bultmann; and Bultmann is not a late nineteenth century theologian. Has Barth perchance dismissed these heretical blasphemies too lightly and too prematurely?

Some, but hardly sufficient, justification for this light-hearted dismissal of modernism comes in two "terminological elucidations." "The first is that everything depends on the statement that God is the One who loves, and nothing depends on the statement that he is a person. The personality of God, unknown to the Bible and the Reformers, emerged as a battle cry only in modern controversy. Taken by itself it does not say the right thing it is meant to say." The important thing is that God is the One who loves, that God is not a thing, but the speaking and acting Subject, the original and real I. The concept of personality is too colorless. We use it when necessary, "but we can have no essential interest in the modern debate centered on this concept . . . In preaching nothing is to be gained by this concept, and nothing lost. The only thing which matters [why should anything matter if the indestructible Church survives all historical episodes?] is that God's Word should be proclaimed as the Word of the One, the One who loves . . . and not as an expression of our own eternity and therefore not as the Word of a general neutral truth or goodness. What will then be proclaimed is not that God is a person, but the particular person he is" (*ibid.*, p. 296).

The particular person God is, i.e., the nature of God, should beyond all doubt be emphasized in Christian preaching. He should be clearly distinguished from the imaginary beings that modernism talks about, both the being they call God and the being they call man. But when Barth suggests that such a proclamation can be made without using the concepts of person or personality, he seems to be confusing a word or term with a concept. One may avoid the word 'person,' but in talking of an acting, speaking I, one cannot avoid the concept. In thus forbidding the proclamation of the personality of God, Barth has rhetorically said more than he intended to.

Behind his depreciation of the term or concept of personality lies

his dislike for the common formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is inexact, he holds, to think of three persons in the Trinity. There are three modes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here one should not hastily accuse Barth of modalism, for he explicitly denies it in this extended discussion of the Trinity; but "the concept 'person' should be dropped . . . because in all classical theology it has never in fact been understood and interpreted in the sense in which we are accustomed to think of the term today. The Christian Church has never taught that there are in God three persons and therefore three personalities in the sense of a threefold Ego, a threefold Subject. This would be tritheism" (*ibid.*, p. 297).

This is not the place to discuss the Trinity. The matter at hand concerned two terminological elucidations by which Barth optimistically relegated the liberal concept of God to a past episode in Church history. This is a judgment which a convinced Calvinist, or an orthodox Lutheran, can hardly suppose to be well-founded. They would, however, agree that in the main Barth's analysis of the liberal conception of God is accurate and devastating. Modernism substitutes man for God.

Derivative Doctrines

The present chapter might well end at this point. The contrast between anthropologizing and revelation has been made, as also the contrast between two conceptions of God. And these two contrasts are what is important. There are, however, subsidiary details. The reader will recall the passage in the Preface where Barth specifies modernism's loss of the Trinity and the Virgin Birth as evidence of its barbarism and insignificance. There are also political implications. For those, then, who would like a sample of such specifications, the following brief list is here appended.

For one thing, in the Preface, Barth saw only the destruction of the Church in the line Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Herrmann. This destruction is accomplished by substituting socialistic politics for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. The Church, according to Barth, should never permit "a question as to whether it is making the necessary contribution towards the preservation or perhaps even to the overthrow of this or that form of society or economy. A proclamation which takes up responsibilities in these

or similar directions spells treachery to the Church and to Christ himself" (I 1, p. 80).

It is by this principle, apparently, that Barth justifies his indifference to the post-World War II struggle between the East and the West. Communistic brutality in Hungary and Tibet does not interest him because the western nations are also guilty of a few blunders. The sentences last quoted are so general that Barth seems to rule out all possibility of a conflict between the proper preaching of the Word and the laws of a state such as Red China. Must one not say, then, that he is shutting his eyes to historical reality? Is he not denying palpable fact? Worse, is he not shutting his eyes to and denying the divine commandments of morality: Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal. Should not the Church condemn the communistic massacres? And could not socialistic taxation be as truly theft as burglary or shoplifting? Such disinterest in governmental morality is surely not Biblical. Calvin and Knox took quite a little interest in government, and the Old Testament prophets are known to have rebuked kings. If Barth had restricted his formula to civil matters which are either too trivial for the Church to notice, or too technical for the Church to arrive at a clear judgment on Biblical principles; or if he had accused modernism of preaching an evil doctrine when it substituted socialism for the Gospel, his position could have been much more easily defended.

At one time in his life Barth was very willing for the Church to make a pronouncement on governmental matters. He was the leading spirit of the Barmen declaration of 1934 against the Nazis. Could he not then equally well condemn Communism without condoning a Church-sponsored socialism? After all, both Nazism and Communism are socialistic. But first, before too much criticism can be indulged in, the problem is to state as accurately and as sympathetically as possible just what Barth's position is.

Since, in order to discharge its real responsibility of preaching the Word, Church proclamation must be unconditionally free in every other direction, not tied down to any national economics or the like, the substitution of some other message is really an attack on the nature and existence of the Church itself. It is the most oppressive attack possible. "Church proclamation had assuredly no room for the ideas of eudemonistic rationalism, to which modern socialism owes its origin and from which it has derived its spiritual look to this day.

The new 'Humanism' preached today in America, the single aim of which is to become the world-view of the near future, already betrays, by the perfect way in which it potters along, the fact that, compared with the Church, it is in itself in an extremely subordinate position" (I 1, p. 81). On the following page Barth makes some remarks about the prophetic socialism of Kutter, the political socialism of Ragaz, and lastly Tillich, who after the war replaced socialism with profane culture in general and erected it into a systematic principle over against the Church. A socialistic Church therefore is one which attends to an alien voice, one whose energies are dissipated, one which imagines that a capacity for radical social ideals is a substitute for concentration on her own hitherto neglected business.

Then, next, the Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Herrmann line destroys the Church not only by its socialism but also by its liberal view of the Old Testament. Barth has a most interesting excursus on the canonicity of the Old Testament and its position, not as a mere introduction to the New Testament, but its indispensable foundation. "Both in the early days and more recently there have been many proposals and attempts to shake off the so-called Old Testament altogether or to reduce it to the level of a deutero-canonical introduction to the 'real' Bible (i.e., the New Testament) . . . Neither in the New Testament nor in the documents of the second century post-apostolic period do we find the slightest trace of anyone seriously and responsibly trying to replace the Holy Scriptures of Israel by other traditions of other nations . . . Even Marcion never plunged in this direction, although he was near enough to it. We cannot plunge in this direction, we cannot even try to do what Marcion and after him the Socinians and Schleiermacher and Ritschl and Harnack tried to do, without substituting another foundation for the foundation on which the Christian Church is built . . . as R. Wilhelm has suggested . . . B. Gutmann . . . and many recent fools in Germany . . . If we do, . . . we are founding a new Church, which is not a Christian Church" (I 2, p. 488).

The manner in which Harnack had rejected the Old Testament had been documented on an earlier page. "A. von Harnack . . . propounded the thesis that 'to reject the Old Testament in the second century was an error which the great Church rightly rejected; to cling to it in the sixteenth century was a destiny from which the Reformation could not yet withdraw; but still to preserve it after the nineteenth century as a canonical source in Protestantism is the re-

sult of a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis. . . .’ Upon which the simple comment to be made is that by this [rejection of the Old Testament] the Evangelical Church would lose her identity with the Church of the first sixteen centuries” (I 2, p. 74).

That a modernist church cannot be Christian follows from its rejection of the Bible, for in fact modernism rejects the New Testament as well as the Old. The pertinent passage begins with some remarks about Romanism. Romanism reverences the Bible, but of course not the Bible by itself, not a Bible which confronts the Church as the authority, not the Bible as the supreme criterion of Church doctrine. Romanism has a Bible authentically interpreted by the Church herself, a Bible belonging to the Church; the nearest immediate plumb line of Catholic belief is not the verdict of the Bible, but the verdict of the Church’s teaching office, the living voice of Christ, on the Bible. “According to the doctrine of Protestant modernism too, we find the Church ultimately dependent on herself . . . Here too the Bible was not simply thrown aside . . . Here too there was still adherence to the connection between proclamation and the Bible, and also a certain critical right of the Bible to speak in dogmatics . . . So—Wobbermin! . . . But even here the Church does not hold the Bible as a concrete and supreme criterion of herself . . . It is rather the presupposed relativity of the opposition between the Church and the Bible that is essential . . . the capacity ascribed to her of herself determining how far she will let herself be judged by the Bible, and therefore ultimately be herself the judge in her own case. That is what even Protestant modernism does without any infallible teaching office . . . When Ph. K. Marheineke ascribes quite unreservedly to the Christian community the ‘holy spirit of Jesus Christ,’ . . . he lets not only reason but also Church tradition and Scripture be ‘abrogated in their aseity’ and then makes this ‘spirit’ the normative expositor not only of tradition but also of the Bible. . . . And when A. E. Biedermann sets dogmatics the task of gaining knowledge of its nature ‘autonomously,’ by logical working up of our experiential knowledge of the Christian act of faith . . . when he thinks to see this Christian principle in the ‘religious personality of Jesus,’ i.e., in ‘that mutual relation between God and man which in Jesus was the fact of his religious self-consciousness,’ when accordingly he makes the Bible the place where the Christian principle is ‘primarily’ (next to it comes, as in Marheineke, on the same level Church tradition, i.e.,

the historical development in question), as 'the prime form of Christian faith,' to be transmitted by history and science,—what else does that mean than that the relation of dogmatics to the Bible is regarded as a dialectical circle, the course of which is determined by the dogmatist himself? . . . The Roman Pope infallibly interpreting the Bible or the Neo-Protestant Professor of Theology . . . are figures which perhaps really stand out from the same background with the same effectiveness" (I 1, pp. 295-297)

The first two subsidiary specifications against modernism have now been shown to be its attempt to establish a non-Christian Church by substituting socialism for the Bible. With the rejection of the Bible there follows of course the rejection of particular Biblical doctrines.

Since Barth pays scant attention to America, it might not be amiss to refer to one American specification of considerable ecclesiastical magnitude. In 1924 some twelve hundred ministers of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. signed a document known as the Auburn Affirmation. The leaders of this group occupied or within the following fifteen years came to occupy the highest official positions in that denomination. The signers of the Affirmation unanimously denied the infallibility of the Scriptures. They then specified four particulars: the Virgin Birth, the miracles, the vicarious Atonement, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. The document says that some of the signers believe some or even all of these four points, others reject some or even all; but they are unanimous in denying that these four points are essential to Christianity. Thus they envisage a 'Christianity' in which a 'Christ' was not Virgin born, did not work miracles, did not atone for sins by paying the penalty on the cross, and after death did not rise again. Quite obviously such a 'Christianity' has nothing in common with the Church of the first sixteen centuries.

Now, Barth mentions these four points here and there through his enormous volumes; but for the present purpose the emphasis will be restricted to another and more important point, the Deity of Christ. Barth does not use the American terminology, the Deity of Christ; he uses the older phrase, the Divinity of Christ. This phrase in nineteenth century modernist usage came to mean something less than Deity and obscured the fact that modernists were reducing Christ to the level of a mere man. Barth's usage seems to be the earlier usage in which it is the equivalent of Deity. His section on the Trinity hardly allows any other view. "The dogma as such is not to be found

in the Biblical texts. The dogma is an interpretation. But we can convince ourselves that it is a good, relevant interpretation of those texts. Therefore we throw in our lot with it in declaring the divinity of Christ is true, eternal divinity. . . . In him . . . God sets and gives to be known, not some thing, be it the greatest and most significant, but himself exactly as he posits and knows himself from eternity and in eternity. He is the Son or the Word of God for us because he was so previously in himself. It is one of the many optical illusions of modernist Protestantism to have deemed it a possible duty to interpret and discredit this 'antecedently in himself,' i.e., the confession of the true eternal divinity of Christ" (I 1, pp. 475-476). "But the objection that in the dogma of the divinity of Christ an untheological speculation is involved, is also substantially foolish and untenable, and must in the end rebound against the originator of it" (*ibid.*, p. 480; cf. pp. 482-483).

Again, Barth quotes Herder on the Chalcedonian formula as follows: 'The desire was to define in monkish language what no human reason . . . will ever be able to define, namely, the union of the two natures in Christ . . . Our Protestant Church has nothing to do with this monkish delusion of the Greeks . . . since all Evangelists say that Christ was a man like us . . . All scholastic hairsplitting, on the other hand, which turns him into an ex-human illusion, is directly contrary to the Scriptures of the New Testament and pernicious" (I 2, p. 126). In this quotation from Herder Barth sees a formal and a material objection to the Deity of Christ. "The formal objection is quite simply aimed at the unmistakable meticulousness with which the fathers, the scholastics, and the post-Reformation orthodox pursued the task of explaining . . . the cardinal statement *vere homo vere Deus*." Indeed the language was hairsplitting, Barth admits, and the attempt was intellectualism. Later Christians treated the matter more simply, but only because the question itself had been simplified. "If one regards the biography of the so-called historical Jesus as the original and proper content of the New Testament, it will be easy to get on in Christology without meticulousness or polemics, without monkish language or scholastic hairsplitting." But if he considers the Pauline and Johannine statement that Jesus is the Christ and the Synoptic statement that the Christ is Jesus, "if he acknowledges that Christology involves the task of giving an account of the one reality described by these two statements . . . then he may at least understand

that the Church's Christology may become an involved task, and necessarily so in face of the errors that actually preoccupy the Church in every century." If he participates in the task and does not limit himself to an onlooker's criticism, he will realize that he cannot escape the profound discussions of Chalcedon and the need of difficult thought and language.

Herder's material objection to the two natures of Christ and therefore to his Deity was that it makes Christ "a divine phantom" whom "we can neither imitate nor follow." Later Ritschl and Harnack expressed essentially the same objection by regarding the Christ of primitive Christology as a metaphysical construct and its motivation as physical rather than ethical. "The reproach of 'intellectualism' is therefore brought against primitive Christology for this reason, that conceptually the physico-mechanical event which is its content can be only the object of a theoretical faith, which is really to be described as a speculative vision. Christ, 'a picture in the clouds to be wondered at!' 'A monkish delusion of the Greeks!' We cannot regard this reproach as well-founded either" (I 2, p. 128).

Barth's reasons for rejecting the modernist view of Christ are very interesting. He admits that early Christology did not share Ritschl's desire to expound Christ as 'the form of the purest man on earth,' an actual instance of the pattern of a so-called healthy ethics. Its conception of salvation included man's physical nature and the resurrection of the body. "Even when it spoke of God, it did not primarily, far less exclusively, think of him as the giver and guarantor of the moral law, but in fact it thought also of his unchangeableness and immortality . . . It had therefore above all a richer view of God and divine salvation than its modern critics . . . Right from the outset, modern Christology aims at a very different statement from that of the Early Church. Hence the repugnance to its meticulousness, . . . For what it [modernism] refuses to say is that Christ is the datum upon which we can reflect and speak as upon the beginning of all Christian thought. It refuses, at bottom, to say what was once said in the formula *vere Deus vere homo*. But it is ready to say of Christ, *either* that it regards him as the highest instance of what elsewhere it claims to know as good, reasonable, moral, and to that extent divine, *or* that it will value him empirically as a bit of specially impressive reality. In either case the meaning is that the beginning of Christian thought and language is by no means in Christ himself but in our own powers of judgment and our own capacity for experience" (I 2, pp. 126-131).

There is much else of great interest both in the passages cited and in others not cited. The quantity is immense, but as one reads the material carefully, one becomes more and more impressed with the qualitative massiveness. What has here been reproduced is only a sample, yet a sufficient sample to illustrate Barth's style as well as to explain his rejection of liberal theology. The main point is that modernism puts man in the place of God. On this point Barth agrees with contemporary humanists, such as Edwin A. Burt, who, in his *Types of Religious Philosophy*, argues that, if logically developed, modernism would come completely over to the humanistic, atheistic position. As Barth puts it, the basic thrust of liberal theology is toward Feuerbach. Actually it retains some Christian elements, but this is an inconsistency. So far as the Church is concerned, Barth regards this as a happy inconsistency, for it provides a possibility of reform. But as a system of thought, modernism is basically anti-Christian. Its knowledge of the God who turns out to be only a man, the liberal theologian himself, is developed out of ordinary human resources alone and in no way depends on special revelation. Thus finally modernism rejects Jesus Christ, however much it makes pious use of his empty name.

Barth and Hitler

This chapter began with historical allusions to Kaiser Wilhelm, World War I, and ninety-three theological professors. An allusion to the "German Christians" and Hitler will give the chapter its biographical end.

In 1933 the Evangelical Church in Germany was called upon "to recognize in the political events of that year, and especially in the form of the God-sent Adolf Hitler, a source of specific new revelation of God, which, demanding obedience and trust, took its place beside the revelation attested in Holy Scripture, claiming that it should be acknowledged by Christian proclamation and theology as equally binding and obligatory. When this demand was made, and a certain audience was given to it, there began, as is well-known, the so-called German Church conflict. It has since become clear that behind this first demand stood quite another. According to the dynamic of the political movement, what was already intended, although only obscurely outlined, in 1933 was the proclamation of this new revelation as the only revelation, and therefore the transformation of the Chris-

tian Church into the temple of the German nature- and history-myth" (II 1, p. 173).

Barth then goes back in history to other instances where some natural revelation was added beside that of the Scripture, with the result that the 'also' soon disclosed itself to be an 'only.' Resistance to these insidious demands was most naive within conservative circles.¹

The strength of Hitler's appeal within the Church lay in these earlier precedents. Totalitarianism simply asked that it be received as the Church had received previous proposals. Those were good in their time; today national socialism meets the need; and the Gospel, applied in this timely fashion, will in itself remain unaltered. The Church had admitted the same contention in the cases of eighteenth century Stoic humanism, nineteenth century idealism and romanticism, the later bourgeois positivism, and finally Socialism. Why should the new nationalism of race be denied a hearing? "If it was admissible and right and perhaps even orthodox to combine the knowability of God in Jesus Christ with his knowability in nature, reason, and history . . . and this had been the case not only in Germany but in the Church in all lands for a long time—it is hard to see why the German Church should not be allowed to make its own particular use of the procedure." What the German Christians did was simply to follow the line of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, as the churches in Switzerland, England, and America were also doing in their own way.

There were, however, a few Christians who were not deceived. They were not deceived by Hitler, but what is really more important, they were not deceived by Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Herrmann. Had the men of Barmen merely opposed the coming atrocities of Hitler, they would have deserved their measure of political honor, but no more. What they saw, and what most did not see, was that the Church had been guilty of compromising Jesus Christ for centuries. Their protest was directed not only against the twentieth century Church but also against the Church of the nineteenth and eighteenth. The common disaster was that something added to the Gospel 'also,' inevitably slid down an inclined plane to 'only.' In all cases some form of natural theology crowds out special revelation.

¹ Barth specifies Abraham Kuyper, but he does not explain Kuyper's fault, unless it be that Kuyper engaged in politics. Further, if by conservative circles he means those who have accepted the Scripture as "the only rule" of faith and practice (Shorter Catechism Q. 2), it is not certain that even naïveté can be used as a blanket accusation.

Hence the Barmen Declaration reads in part, "We condemn the false doctrine that the Church can and must recognize as God's revelation other events and powers, forms and truths, apart from and alongside this one Word of God," (cf. I 2, pp. 460, 630, and I 1, p. xi).

Barth refused to open his classes with the Nazi salute; he refused to pledge unconditional allegiance to Hitler; and in 1935 was forced to take refuge in his homeland and natal city Basel.

III

DOGMATIC METHOD

The preceding chapter summarized Barth's shattering attack on modernism. Barth chiefly accused liberal theology of replacing God by man and thus of leading logically to atheistic humanism. That his understanding of this logical tendency is correct is attested by the humanists themselves, who reproach modernism with having retained an emotional and inconsistent attachment to some diluted Christian themes after having rejected the fundamental doctrines.

Now, if one takes a stand within the Christian Church, the summarized material of the preceding chapter is sufficient to convince him that he cannot consistently be both a Christian and a Neo-Protestant. This appeal to consistency and Church loyalty, Barth uses on various occasions. With respect to modernistic criteria of Church proclamation, i.e., the criteria of philosophy, science, or history, Barth advances certain considerations which will "really weigh with and possibly force from the road mentioned only those for whom the Word of God as a concrete and independent criterion has not completely disappeared from the field of vision" (I 1, pp. 288, 289, 292, 293). So long as the Bible remains in view, the problem of its relation to Church proclamation must be faced. If on the other hand we no longer recognize this criterion, we are not to accept our loss as an historic fate, but as a sign of the wrath of God, with which one cannot come to terms in the Church. "Faith may at any moment fall

headlong into unbelief . . . and the temptation arises . . . to settle down comfortably in unbelief and fend for oneself. Faith overcomes this temptation . . . The introduction of another criterion can only mean here that the undertaking itself is also becoming different, that it is ceasing to be the Church's mandated undertaking . . . The Church cannot listen to any other voice than the voice of her Lord, as the decisive word about her proclamation . . . The choice of other criteria . . . betrays itself as an act signifying the abandonment of the Church's terrain." Clearly the whole force of this argument depends on one's desire to remain in the Church, that is, on one's judgment as to what the Church really is.

In another place, where Barth is considering the disparagement of the Church and its doctrines, disparagement caused by periods of shameful corruption, he replies: "Such a verdict might be dangerous because if in the Church a man is determined to look upon and regard others in this purely external fashion, he must submit to the interrogatory as to whether on the contrary he himself is not perhaps the outsider, as being the adherent of a heresy or of an alien religion" (I 1, p. 433).

The Church and the World

However, there are people who escape the force of these *ad hominem* interrogatories. Not to mention heretics who may wish to reconstruct the Church on other terrain, there are many who take their stand deliberately outside of the Christian Church. There is a world of secular philosophy and irreligious culture. Julian Huxley has written on *Religion Without Revelation*, and Corliss Lamont talks of *The Illusion of Immortality*. Of course there are also Buddhism and Islam. Does Barth, then, after overwhelming the heretics, or before, have anything to say to these unbelievers, these heathen, these humanists? Does he have something more fundamental than an *ad hominem* argument? At first glance it seems not. Barth nowhere addresses the outside world directly, certainly not in any sustained argument (cf. *Anselm*, pp. 62-63, quoted in the Excursus in the next chapter). Of course by publishing his writings Barth invites the general public as well as Church members to consider theology; but that is about as far as Barth's interest in the world seems to go.

Yet it may be that the principles of an apologetic, the outlines of

an evangelistic policy, the leading ideas of a direct appeal to secularism are to be found between the lines. How Barth might address the outside world may possibly be discovered by an analysis of the methods he uses in his more prominent material against modernism. Even if the latter is the chief enemy, the specific accusations presuppose some methodical procedure, not entirely invisible in the summaries above, but more fully outlined in what is to follow. The nature and purpose of Dogmatics is involved, its dependence on or independence of Apologetics or Prolegomena, and therefore its relation to philosophy. Barth is not without ideas on these matters, for it is here that he criticizes Brunner. Is his view, then, a systematic and rational whole, so that outside the Church his leading principles can be directed to the world of science and secularism?

Despite his seeming disinterest and unconcern, Barth may have spoken better than he intended. His method may reach farther than he thought. It might even be that a critic, by alleging some hesitancy in Barth, some vacillation, and possibly inconsistency, and then by stressing one part while submerging another, could suggest what to him at least seems to be a more promising continuation.

The nature and purpose of Dogmatics, fundamental both within the Christian Church and for its policy toward the outside world, Barth discusses in the very first chapter of his *Church Dogmatics*. This we must now study with great care. The opening pages are extremely difficult.

The emphasis on the sphere of the Church, already mentioned, begins in the title, *Church Dogmatics*. As explained in the Foreword, the word 'Church' is used rather than the word 'Christian' in order to "point to the circumstance that dogmatics is not a 'free' science, but one bound to the sphere of the Church, where and where alone it is possible and sensible" (p. ix). "To the best of my ability," Barth continues, "I have cut out in this second issue of the book everything that in the first issue might give the slightest appearance of giving to theology a basis, support, or even a mere justification in the way of existential philosophy." In his earlier writings there had been some ground for "acumen or even stupidity" to suppose that he had found his principles in existentialism. This he here denies. But it is equally true, as the attack on modernism has broadly suggested, that Barth as little depends on Hegelianism or other well-known types of philosophy. Thus the problem of the foundation of

Dogmatics and its relation to human learning in general is posed at the outset.

What then is Dogmatics? The Church by sermon and sacrament speaks about God. This necessitates the further activity of weighing what is said, of criticizing and revising the language used. Theology as a science, distinguished from individual testimony and public worship, is this activity; it is the Church's measuring her own language about God against her existence as a Church. Theology therefore arises out of previous proclamation and guides subsequent proclamation.

Since such theology is a responsible undertaking, it may be said to be "scientific" in character, ranking independently along with other human undertakings, though these two claims can be upheld only practically and with reservations.

From a man whose interest in Dogmatics is sufficient to have caused him to devote his life to the writing of so many volumes, the reader might expect, if not over-enthusiastic, at least very firm expressions of the importance of theology. This expectation is confirmed by Barth's reference to the scientific character of theology and by his ranking it independently along with other human undertakings. But some of the difficulty in understanding Barth's first few pages arises from the circumstance that the unexpected follows. Instead of firmly upholding the dignity of theology in comparison with anthropology, history, or philosophy, Barth warns us that its scientific character and independence can be upheld only practically and with reservations. What does he mean?

In ranking theology along with other sciences Barth does not seem to have in mind anything that occurs outside of the Church. He is not referring to the academic subjects of the secular world. He merely means that criticism of the Church's language about God can as well come from "philosophy or historical science or sociology or psychology or pedagogics, or all of them together, working in the sphere of the Church . . . and thus render theology superfluous" as an independent subject. Theology has neither a special epistemology nor an objective area necessarily hidden from these other sciences. "Philosophy and 'secular' sciences generally really need not be 'secular,' need not be heathen; it might be *philosophia christiana*." In practice, however, there has never been a *philosophia christiana*, and Barth has no desire to construct one. But since the interests of the Church

are not simply to be neglected, Barth proceeds directly to theology whose separate existence "can only be justified as a relative necessity, necessary in practice" (p. 4).

If Barth is not insistent on theology's independence and necessity with reference to a Christian epistemology or sociology, still less is he interested in ranking it with secular science. Theology has no inner grounds on which to base such a claim. "Rather it has abundant reason to renounce it in every form" (p. 6). Barth finds no Protestant before Baier in 1686 who called theology a science, and the next one was Buddeus in 1724. Otherwise they call it *doctrina* or *sapientia*. In the nineteenth century it was perhaps usual to call theology a science, and in the twentieth Wobbermin is pathetic in his assurance that theology is "a science in the strict, in fact the strictest sense of the word" (p. 6).

At this point a reader who has some smattering of the newly popular theory of linguistics may wish to dismiss the question whether theology is a science or not as a trivial matter of semantics, especially in view of the fact that German *Wissenschaft* is broader than American *Science*. Are not definitions arbitrary? Undoubtedly they are; but after the term 'science' has been defined, the inclusion or exclusion of theology is a substantial question. If Julian Huxley, for example, defines science in terms of some definite experimental procedure, and then claims that a scientific theology and no other kind is possible, obviously he is making an important attack on Christianity. Thus, when science is defined and theology is included or excluded, not only is theology thereby characterized, but further its relation to physics, psychology, sociology, and perhaps philosophy is also indicated. Barth wishes to exclude theology from *Wissenschaft* and *a fortiori* from "Science." At the very least theology must not deviate from its task, even if this means sacrificing every consideration of what "science" means elsewhere. Other sciences compel respect by the fidelity with which they follow out their axioms and methods. Theology, Barth asserts, should have a corresponding fidelity; but it cannot adopt their concrete methods.

The importance of this problem can hardly be overestimated. One of the most insistent attacks on orthodox Protestantism is the charge that two incompatible methods of learning are acknowledged. In physics and zoology reliance is placed in observation and experience; but in matters of theology the totally different method of

revelation is followed. Against this schizophrenia, as they so delicately call it, the secularists and the experiential religionists combine. Hence it is extremely important, on any point of view, to determine the methods of science and theology, and their relationship.

What then does Barth mean by the "science" from which theology is excluded? To define science he quotes, apparently with approval, the six norms listed by Heinrich Scholz: 1. Freedom from contradiction—the Proposition Postulate; 2. The unity in its objective sphere—the Coherence Postulate; 3. All propositions to be capable of being tested by any reader or hearer who is sufficiently attentive—Controllability Postulate; 4. Regard to what is physically and biologically impossible—Congruity Postulate; 5. Freedom from any sort of prejudice—Independence Postulate; 6. All propositions to be capable of being broken up into axioms and theorems and susceptible of proof on this basis. This sixth norm Scholz "solemnly" identifies as 'the supreme claim which can be made on any science.'

As a description of scientific method these six norms are not the best formulation Barth could have selected. The Logical Positivists with their discussions of verifiability and the articles in the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* provide a more competent technical description of contemporary scientism. Ernst Mach, Henri Poincare, Percy Bridgman, or Herbert Feigl would have been better authors to quote. However, since their views have not been universally adopted, there is some value in using a looser statement. It would be just too easy to exclude theology from science if the latter receives a Logical Positivist definition. Barth chooses the more difficult course, rejecting flatly the last five norms and accepting the first only upon a very limited interpretation. Let us then test the six points one by one.

The Norm of Logic

The first, or "Proposition Postulate" requires a science to be free from self-contradiction. Why does Barth hesitate here? Should not, must not, theology acknowledge this norm? Can it, alone of all intellectual endeavors, make mutually contradictory assertions? Yet Barth claims that theology must restrict the law of contradiction to a very limited interpretation. "The very minimum postulate of freedom from contradiction is acceptable by theology only upon

the very limited interpretation, by the scientific theorist upon the scarcely tolerable one, that theology will not assert an irremovability in principle of the 'contradictions' which it is bound to make good." This sentence is singularly obscure. It actually says that theology does not assert that contradictions are irremovable. But it does not say or logically imply that theology asserts that they are removable. The sentence immediately following this difficult phraseology is presumably meant to clarify the matter. "But the propositions in which it asserts their removal will be propositions concerning the free action of God, and so not propositions that 'remove' the contradictions 'from the world' " (p. 8). Analyze this as one may, it is at best a hesitation with respect to the law of contradiction that ill accords with a theology of the Logos.

Inasmuch as Barth has been accused of Existentialism, though we have seen that he rejects this as a misunderstanding, and inasmuch as his early works echo the ideas of Kierkegaard—Paradox, Eternity and Time, Infinite Qualitative Difference, Totally Other—and inasmuch as these lines of thought hold logic in irrationalistic dispute, it is important to raise the question of Barth's position on the law of contradiction and contemporary irrationalism.¹ If Barth says here that the law of contradiction holds in theology only under limitations scarcely tolerable to the scientific theorist, what does he say elsewhere?

That there are traces of irrationalism in the *Church Dogmatics* can hardly be doubted. For example, he denies several times that theology can be made systematic, whereas if its contents were rational and logical one would normally expect it to form a system. "God's Word is not a thing to be described, nor is it a concept to be defined. It is neither a content nor an idea. . . . The equation, God's Word is God's Son, makes anything doctrinaire in regarding the Word of God radically impossible. In it and only in it is a real and effective barrier raised against what can be made . . . of Holy Scripture according to the theory of later Old Protestantism, a fixed total of revealed propositions to be systematized like the sections of a *corpus* of law" (I 1, p. 155-156). Perhaps this does not mean that the propositions of theology are mutually contradictory; it may mean that they are disjointed and irrelevant one to another; or it may mean that the Word of God is a superrational entity never grasped in propositions.

¹ Cf. the writer's *Thales to Dewey*, chapter 11; Houghton Mifflin, 1957.

Since Barth's meaning is not absolutely clear, a critic should not be too eager to press an accusation of irrationalism. The possibility must of course be kept in mind, but the passage last quoted, with certain omissions, only shows a certain hesitation regarding the extent of the applicability of logic.

Something a little more than hesitation is seen in a later passage. Speaking of the antitheses of law and gospel, letter and spirit, wrath and grace, Barth says, "If we think of such pregnant concepts which are constantly developing out of the veiledness or the unveiledness of the Word of God, we shall not think of saying—we could only do so by a wicked weakening of all these serious concepts—that we could . . . systematically connect them with one another. . . . If now we are to listen to Ex. 19-20 and Jer. 31, obviously we cannot listen to both at the same time. An historical analysis of the two texts from the religious standpoint would instantly teach us in its own way that a systematic conspectus of both is an impossibility . . . There was a time in which O.T. science regarded it as impossible for one and the same prophet to have spoken one way in one passage and another way in another passage. Nowadays we have grown more cautious. We shall say that predictions of salvation and catastrophe, in the absolute way in which they both appear, were naturally not possible simultaneously, or by any sort of inward connection; there can therefore be no system of prophetic utterance. . . . That the Johannine representation is the direct antithesis of the Synoptic is not at all a bad historical hypothesis theologically . . . It is impossible to listen to the two statements at the same time . . . As a final example I instance the relation of the Cross or death and the resurrection of Christ . . . True, St. Paul always means both when he simply says 'Jesus Christ' or 'in Christ,' but it is significant that it is only by this name that he can really express both. This name is anything but a system representing a unified experience or a unified thought" (I 1, pp. 204-206).

Since the argument is long and complicated, let us retrace the main steps. The original question was, Does theology have anything to say to the secular world? This question brought up the relation of theology to science. One of the norms of science is freedom from contradiction; and Barth seems to hesitate to affirm that theology is systematic and logical. The last passage quoted, if taken at face value, is not mere hesitation; it is a specific denial of freedom from self-contradiction.

Barth asserts that the concepts of theology cannot be systematically connected, a systematic conspectus is an impossibility, and the name Jesus Christ as used by Paul does not represent a unified thought. Barth's point is not merely that the Bible is inconsistent. He indeed holds that it is; he accepts only its main teaching and rejects the doctrine of infallible inspiration. But here he is talking about theology, his own theology; and it is his own theology that he now says is illogical, unsystematic, and self-contradictory. The wording just quoted does not so much refer to the Biblical writers themselves as it refers to what the theologian can do with them. Not only Paul lacks a unified thought when he uses the name Jesus Christ; this is true of Barth also. In the name Jesus Christ "Cross and Resurrection are one, but not," Barth significantly adds, "—either for Paul, or for his first readers, or for us either—in what is stated in explanation over and above this name." In these words, "for his first readers, or for us either," Barth denies that theology can be systematic, logical, and consistent.

This is not the sort of thing that recommends itself to the scientific world outside the Church, and it would seem that a repudiation of logic could only be an embarrassment to the Christian. Now, Barth could have avoided this embarrassment in either one of two opposite ways. He could have chosen to take issue with some of the propositions embedded in the last citation. Instead of asserting, he could have denied that an historical analysis of Exodus and Jeremiah shows their systematic irreconcilability. And really this is not too hard to do. At least, the Reformers saw no irreconcilability there. Similarly the prophetic predictions of catastrophe and salvation are not obviously inconsistent or devoid of any sort of inner connection. The two are rather clearly connected. Again, as Geerhardus Vos has argued in great detail in *The Self Disclosure of Jesus* the Johannine representation is not the direct antithesis of the Synoptic teaching. And, finally, why the death and resurrection of Christ cannot be conjoined in unified thought is somewhat of a mystery. There is also a second way in which Barth could have avoided the embarrassment of irrationalism. If law and gospel cannot possibly be fitted together, why should not a theologian discard the one he dislikes in order to retain the other uncompromised. Retain grace and discard wrath, as is commonly done. Or, *vice versa*, so far as logic is concerned. Retain the death of Christ and deny the resurrection, to avoid the super-

natural; or, if logic really does not matter, retain the resurrection and deny that Christ died. Or, if both are so embedded in the Scripture that rejection of either one is a rejection of Scriptural authority, why not openly reject so contradictory an authority? In any case, how can theology speak intelligibly to the world if it cherishes self-contradictions within its unsystematic bosom?

Nevertheless it is not only Barth's irrationalistic paragraphs that need emphasis. In a twentieth century setting it is also Barth's opposition to irrationalism that calls for notice. A brief indication occurs in an early work where Barth says, "Even the *regnum naturae* is the Kingdom of God . . . In this sense we must accept the well-known and often condemned Hegelian dictum regarding the rationality of all being" (W.G. p. 300). This is a short sentence, but any Barthian praise of Hegel is noteworthy.

Again, "Nor are we bound to envelope certain anthropological centers with so fundamental a distrust and suspicion as has frequently been the case in the history of theology. Here I am thinking chiefly of the extraordinary polemic which it has been the fashion in recent years to wage against the so-called 'intellect' of man, his powers of comprehension and thought, as a center of possible religious experience of the Word of God." Barth specifies two opposite attacks that have been made on the intellect. Some people take intellectual activity as a sign of lazy passivity, action sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought; others regard intellection as the peak of presumptuous self-determination. Of course, intellect might lack power and it might lack humility; but this is just as true of feeling, conscience, will, or any other faculty. "Is it not arbitrary prejudice to suppose that in the act of thought in particular, man is man in a worse sense than in his other self-realizations? . . . It is notorious that it was only on the retreat before modern agnosticism and not earlier that Christian faith hit upon this extraordinary judgment." To prepare for a point to be made later on, let it be noted here that one reason Barth gives for honoring, or at least for not dishonoring, the intellect is that "the Word of God is quite literally language . . . If that be so the communication of it to man must at least also involve a claim upon the intellect . . . Does not the anti-intellectualism of modern theology mean on the one hand an effort after holiness which rests upon self-deception . . . on the other hand a restriction of possible experience of the Word of God at its most crucial point which might

very soon mean complete denial of it. We cannot regard this as at all a respectable proceeding. We regard it as a form of convulsions, recovery from which is essential to a sight of what is really to be seen here" (I 1, pp. 230-232).

Again, although Barth here and there decries systematizing theology, his actual practice is often explicitly systematic. He is well aware, for example, that the doctrine of baptism is related to the Nicene Creed as parts of a comprehensive revelation. "We will not be always noting about a theology whether it has any knowledge of baptism and the Lord's Supper, or whether these things are at bottom an embarrassment to it . . . If this is indeed the case, it will surely be revealed at some quite different (though only apparently different) point. We shall perceive that it has no proper knowledge of the distinct validity of the prophetic and apostolic word in the Church, or of the value of dogma, or of the theological relevance of the decision of Nicaea, or the decision of the Reformation . . . And we shall have to ask whether a theology of this kind can have any awareness of the comprehensiveness and unassailable givenness of revelation itself" (I 2, pp. 230-231).

Here it is clear that a decision on one point is determined by its systematic connection with other points. The relation of baptism to Nicaea is not the only example. Barth's defense of the Virgin Birth similarly depends to a good extent on systematic connections, one of which is that "the same objective content is signified in the one case by the miracle of the Virgin Birth, in the other by the miracle of the empty tomb. Once we have looked into this self-enclosed circle, we shall have to meet the attack upon the *natus ex virgine* with the further reflection that by it an indispensable connection is destroyed which is actually found in the creed, so that the *tertia die resurrexit a mortuis*, too, is actually called into question" (I 2, p. 183). Must not one remark that identity of objective content, a self-enclosed circle, and an indispensable connection are expressions of systematic, logical continuity?

Another instance of system and logic is the argument against the Franciscans. Their pietism subjectivized objective revelation, and because they imagined that the historical Christ could now be left behind as something antiquated, they could not consistently accept the Filioque clause. Thus Franciscan pietism led to the anthropology of the humanistic Renaissance (I 2, pp. 250-251). Also, in a discussion

on the Trinity, Barth commends an answer to a question as "strict and logical," and goes on to show wherein "the strictness and logic of the answer . . . consists" (I 1, p. 436). Conversely, he disapproves of another argument because it is a *petitio principii*, a violation of the rules of logic (I 1, p. 463).

It is abundantly clear therefore that Barth in many passages accepts and uses the law of contradiction. He makes unmistakable claims to intelligibility and rationality. But there were also the other passages in which he belittled systematic thought and accepted mutually incompatible ideas. Now, perhaps the occurrence of these two types of thought in the *Church Dogmatics* could be explained on the hypothesis that Barth began his public career under the influence of Kierkegaardian irrationalism, that he has since moved away from his early position, but has not completely eliminated all traces of that existentialism. Under these conditions, taking Barth's text as it is, being unable to explain away either the one part or the other, is not a critic permitted to select the part he approves of and to extend it further than Barth himself has actually done? This critic confesses to a respect for rationality. Whether theology is a science or not, whether or not it fulfills the other five norms, it can violate the norm of logic only on pain of having nothing worthwhile to say to the outside world. Barth has declared that theology can accept this norm only under restrictions scarcely tolerable to a scientific theorist. Can a Biblical theologian, a Calvinist, accept this statement at face value? It would mean, not only that he would have nothing to say to the outside world, but that he would have nothing to say to himself. Freedom from internal self-contradiction is the *sine qua non* of all intelligibility.

But perhaps we need not take Barth's statement at face value; maybe, to use one of Barth's Latin expressions, we can interpret it *in meliorem partem*. Theology does not assert in principle the irremovability of contradictions; in principle theology aims at logical consistency; but the contradictions which outside science charges against theology are removable only by the free action of God; hence theology has no propositions that can remove the contradictions "from the world." Unfortunately Barth does not give examples under this all too brief statement. He might have in mind miracles of nature which contradict the recognized laws of science. This, however, would be a matter of the Congruity Postulate: "regard to be had to what is physically or biologically impossible." Or, he might have in mind the forgiveness

of sin. Such spiritual matters contradict Logical Positivism's dictum that all spiritual matters are pure nonsense. But neither miracles nor the charge of nonsense justifies Barth's hesitation over the norm of logical consistency. Therefore, whether he is thinking of miracles in nature or of spiritual realities, the contradictions envisaged do not seem to be contradictions between two parts of Christian theology, but between Christian theology and the secular science of our time. Barth says bluntly "This very concept [of contemporary science] theology can but flatly declare to be unacceptable to it." Agreed; but if scientism needs refutation, why should Barth disparage logic?

Norms Two to Five

Now we come to the next step of the exposition and argument. If Barth allows a certain limited application of logic to theological problems, the other five norms he rejects *in toto*. "Not an iota can be yielded here without betraying theology, for any concession here involves surrendering the theme of theology."

Take now the second norm, the Coherence Postulate, which requires unity in the objective sphere of any science. Why should theology transgress this norm? Are the divisions of theology so unrelated that no unity may be found? Must the subject be split up into several subjects? The secular sciences face a danger from the opposite direction. Biology seems to be merging with chemistry and chemistry with physics. It is hard to keep the boundary lines distinct. One school of science regards this, not as a danger, but as a desideratum, and accepts the ideal of unified science. But disunified theology would seem to result, if we took seriously Barth's unyielding refusal to concede one iota. This refusal and this result do not appear desirable, nor do they conform with Barth's own procedure, as we saw in the example of baptism and Nicaea. We shall let the matter drop for the moment, however, for the unity of theology will be discussed again under the sixth norm.

The third norm, the Controllability Postulate, states that all propositions should be capable of testing by any reader or hearer who is sufficiently attentive. As understood by the laboratory sciences it is undoubtedly inconsistent with theology as understood by Barth and by many others. But this inconsistency depends on the assumption that all truth is obtainable by laboratory experimentation. If, how-

ever, positivistic theories of sensory verifiability are rejected on principle, if the possibility of truth is not confined to a sensory origin, a controllability postulate may find a place even in theology. In fact Barth himself uses one. When he opposes the heresies of modernism, he frequently, perhaps too frequently, relies on the consideration that these heresies exclude their exponents from the Church. The collective judgment of the Church controls and condemns the private opinions of the liberals. Furthermore, Protestant orthodoxy, in contrast with Barth's theology, can extend this verifiability principle even beyond the Church by accepting the Bible as its criterion. Barth very definitely denies that theology consists in the systematization of the contents of Scripture. He dissents from the older Protestant view by stating that "the task of Dogmatics is thus not merely the combination, repetition, and transcription of a number of already present 'truths of revelation.' . . . In Dogmatics it can never be a question of the mere combination, repetition, and summarizing of Biblical doctrine" (I 1, pp. 15-16). In the following note Barth is quite clear that such was the older view. He makes no claim to be an orthodox Protestant. But if he were, if he held that theology is precisely the summarization and systematization of the Biblical text and its logical implications, and this is the most natural method of evaluating Church proclamation, he could accept the third scientific norm and could come closer to giving an answer to every man who asks for a reason of the hope that is in him. This extends the Controllability Postulate beyond the limits of the Church, for verification of the conformity of the Church's language about God with its Biblical criterion is possible to anyone who is sufficiently attentive. It requires no experience of grace to compare a sermon with the Scripture. It may of course require a certain amount of study on which a disinterested unbeliever is unwilling to spend the effort. And often a sufficient amount of attention is the result only of divine grace. But there is no absolute need of grace, nor even of extensive scholarship, to conclude that language which denies the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection is inconsistent with the Biblical message.

Barth has something of an answer to this last remark. Also in reply to Scholz, who listed the six norms, Barth admits that a scholar can frame or criticize a Christian view of life and the world without being a Christian, just as he can competently discuss Kant without being a Kantian. "But in dogmatics that is not the point. For 'Christianity'

we must insert here 'the proper content of language about God, ventured upon in the fear of God' " (pp. 18-19). The point perhaps is the definition of dogmatics. Of course, if dogmatics is defined as the activity of a devout Christian, one cannot do dogmatics without being a Christian. But such a definition has the embarrassing characteristic of depending upon the faith of the writer, whereas definitions of subjects, e.g., physics, zoology, politics, ordinarily state the limits of the subject-matter and have nothing to do with the character of the scholars who study them. There is also a further question about definition. Barth seems to deny that dogmatics is a critique of Christianity, in favor of asserting that it is a critique of "the proper content of language about God." This would be a semantic triviality except for the fact that in the same paragraph he identifies the "content" as Jesus Christ. With the substitution of "Jesus Christ" for "content" it follows that dogmatics studies and revises "the Jesus Christ of language about God"—not a very clear indication of what dogmatics is supposed to do. The earlier phraseology was better, namely, the criticizing and revising of the Church's language about God. But now there remains no reason to deny that dogmatics is an attempt to define Christianity by systematizing the Biblical material. What lies at the bottom of Barth's two poor definitions, poor because the personal faith of the theologian enters the first and in the second the shift from the Church's language to Jesus Christ leaves us with a "proper content" that cannot be revised, is Barth's peculiar notion of revelation. This concept must be analyzed separately later on; here only the hint can be given that Barth seems to confuse a body of truth the same for all men with the individual psychology of a given man.

The fourth norm, the Congruity Postulate, asserts that a science must have regard to what is physically and biologically possible. It will be recalled that the discussion of the first norm petered out in a transition from contradictions within a given theology to contradictions between theology and an external body of science. In this fourth norm the latter problem comes properly before us.

Why does Barth object to this postulate? Can anyone defend the position that theology is at liberty to assert as true what science has shown to be impossible? This would be nothing other than the medieval theory of twofold truth and must be judged as disastrous. If the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection are in fact biologically impossible, any theology that wanted to assert them would have to reject the Congruity Postulate. But to believe true in theology what one believes

false in science is the virulent irrationalism of self-contradiction. On the other hand, if Jesus was in fact born of a virgin, in the plain ordinary sense of the words, and not in some deceitful symbolic meaning, then the scientism that denies miracles is false and must be cast aside. But in this case there would be no need to shy away from the fourth postulate. Why should the Christian accept a logical chasm between science and theology? Why should he not welcome the Congruity Postulate but decline to take every scientific theory at face value? Why should he not call for a revision of the popular philosophy of science? One cannot agree with Barth that "the duty of drafting a better definition of science, regarded as a fundamental act of self-justification, can only be rejected on the part of theology" (p. 10). Quite the reverse, on pain of the irrationality of a twofold truth theology is under obligation to defend the truth of Scripture by archaeological excavation where its finds would be applicable and by new theories of physics and biology where their material impinges on Scripture. Of course, one may say that the formulation of a non-positivistic philosophy of science, and *a fortiori* the reconstruction of concrete sciences, ought not to be given the name "theology"; but surely Barth is not concerned about a mere name. He is clearly saying that a Christian, in measuring and revising his language about God, i.e., in constructing a theology, should have no regard to what is physically or biologically possible. Ought a responsible theologian be so blind to the influence of Positivism in the outside world?

Why then does Barth object to the Congruity Postulate? What are his reasons? He writes, "Nor does it [theology] recognize the need of regarding or legitimating itself generally as a science. Nor does it acknowledge the universal concept of science in authority today as also authoritative for itself. Nor does it acknowledge the obligation to oppose to this another concept of science, including and so justifying itself. It regards and designates itself a 'science' because it has no interest in anything but a *de facto* separation from the other so-called efforts of man after knowledge, because it must protest against a concept of science which would exclude precisely this effort it is making after knowledge, because it affirms a unity in all man's efforts after knowledge which though hidden are on the way to it and as such are real; we might also say, because it affirms the Church as the hidden yet ever so real area of all human efforts after knowledge" (I 1, pp. 315-316).

Again the same ideas recur in a Festschrift for Heinrich Barth, his

brother, *Philosophie und Christliche Existenz*, where Karl Barth has an article, *Philosophie und Theologie*. The main thought is that philosophers and theologians seek the same thing, *die eine ganze Wahrheit*, but they seek it in different ways. Therefore they should respect each other and never presume that one method excludes the other. Barth elaborates in persuasive language that does little to remove the difficulties. The theologian and the philosopher, he says, are fellow-men; they are brothers in a common quest. Neither one is the superior of the other; both are servants of the same truth. Their methods, however, are different. The theologian starts with God and descends to the world of space and time. The philosopher starts with this world, with the concept of causality, and ascends from experience to an over-arching structure. Yet, although the theologian notices that the philosopher is proceeding in an opposite direction, he cannot judge him, for *er hat dazu keine facultas*; he can only wonder if the philosopher has a faculty to judge him! Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. *Innerhalb dieser Grenze ist es aber möglich dass das Gegeneinander des Philosophen und des Theologen zum Miteinander und so practisch sinnvoll wird*: i.e., within these limits it is possible that the mutual opposition of philosophers and theologians might become a togetherness and so become practical and meaningful.

These ideas supporting the rejection of the Congruity Postulate require careful scrutiny. Some of the sentences in the quoted paragraph are half-truths. It is well to say that theology does not acknowledge "the universal concept of science in authority today as also authoritative for itself." But can theology, as the *Festschrift* implies, acknowledge today's concept of science as authoritative for science? Can anyone assume that the one method never excludes the other? Is a *de facto* separation sufficient? All that Barth has said against modernism would seem to imply that it is impossible to rise from experience of the space-time world, from independent anthropology and revelation-as-history, to an overarching structure in which God rules. Here in opposing the Congruity Postulate Barth seems to think that science and theology can each go its own way without disturbing the other. He seems to ignore what other people find so obvious: that the contemporary scientism flatly contradicts Christianity. If the one is true, the other must be false. Barth will indeed "protest against a concept of science which would exclude precisely this effort it [theology] is mak-

ing after knowledge;" but he fails to realize that such a concept of science is today the dominant one and bases his hopes on a hidden unity in all man's efforts after knowledge.

But how can there be any unity between a revelation from on high and a principle of sensory verification that claims to be the sole gateway to knowledge? How can theology dare to disclaim an obligation to oppose a new concept of science to the one in authority today? Barth individually may not feel called upon to spend another busy life-time writing on the philosophy of science, but a continuing criticism and revision of Church proclamation to an outside world cannot afford to ignore the problems raised.

Indeed, is not the twentieth century a particularly propitious time for Reformed theologians to hope for a satisfactory reinterpretation of science? In the nineteenth century the propositions of mechanistic science were looked upon as absolute truths. Scientists were very sure of themselves. T. H. Huxley and W. K. Clifford, self-righteously condemned the immorality of theologians in believing on insufficient evidence. Karl Pearson not only claimed that "the scientific method is the sole gateway to the whole region of knowledge," but also that its results are "absolute judgments."¹ A. J. Carlson continues this nineteenth century certitude into the first third of the twentieth: "What is the method of science? In essence it is this—the rejection *in toto* of all non-observational and non-experimental authority in the field of experience. . . . When no evidence is produced other than personal dicta, past or present 'revelations' in dreams, or the 'voice of God,' the scientist can pay no attention whatever, except to ask: How do they get that way?"²

Today, however, is a propitious time for theologians to protest against this view of science, for secular philosophers and many scientists themselves, though they have not moved an inch nearer to Christianity personally, have abandoned these nineteenth century beliefs. It is no longer widely held that science gives absolute knowledge about the constitution of the universe. For one thing, physics has been totally revolutionized. Scientific laws have come and gone in dizzy rapidity. The whole basis of Newtonian mechanics, including straight line motion, has been dropped; and if relativity can be said to have replaced it, nearly everyone agrees that this system also is tentative

¹ *Grammar of Science*, pp. 24, 6.

² *Science*, 73: 217-225, 1931.

only and will in turn give way to another. If then some law of science contradicts a detail of Christianity, the theologian can afford to wait patiently until the scientists change the law. There is also a second thing to be said. The Newtonian laws were commonly held to be descriptions of how the world really works. Atoms really existed; one could build tinker-toy models of them on a large scale; by fixing them together or moving them in set paths a natural phenomenon could be accurately duplicated. But today not only have the old laws been discarded, the significance of law itself has been changed. Let us not claim unanimity for the new outlook, but a fair number of philosophers and scientists have adopted the theory of operationalism. This type of thought denies that the laws of science describe the processes of the real world. Scientific concepts, instead of being transcripts of "antecedent being," are merely plans for future laboratory procedure. They are directions for the use of apparatus in the production of some desired result. Henri Poincaré explained the point in simple language when discussing Lord Kelvin's reliance on mechanical models. It is always possible, he grants, to construct a mechanical model of a natural phenomenon; the trouble is that it is always possible to construct an indefinite number of models of the same phenomenon. Hence no one of them can be seriously taken as the description of what actually happens. Operationalism carries the argument forward and reduces scientific laws to directions for laboratory procedure. Water is not really H_2O , not really composed of groups of three tiny solid particles: H_2O are symbols in the atomic table and taken in that context show how water can be produced in a laboratory. When other methods are invented the chemists will say that water "is" something else. Science then does not describe what Hume called the ultimate springs and principles of nature and which he asserted are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry. How then can science declare what was physically or biologically impossible in the past or future, if it cannot do so for the present? And why then should not theology be interested in operationalism and the philosophy of science?

The fifth norm was freedom from any sort of prejudice. Prejudice of course is a prejudicial word. If it means merely presupposition, then science no more than theology can accept this fifth norm. It is part of the nineteenth century baggage along with the idea that scientific laws are absolute truths. Hence it may be dropped from this discussion as irrelevant.

Axiomatization

But the sixth and last scientific norm, to which Barth does not give a name, that all propositions should be capable of being arranged in the form of axioms and theorems, again plunges us deep into a long discussion. And lest the direction be lost from view, it should be stated now that Barth has failed, let us say it kindly but pointedly, failed completely to establish the position that "as a theologian he cannot escape the necessity of transgressing" these norms.

The ideal of axiomatization is closely related to the possibility of system and rationality. All who favor axiomatization favor systematization *ipso facto*; all who favor system and rationality would usually be expected to look upon axiomatization as at least an ideal. Conversely, denials of the possibility of systematization automatically exclude axiomatization. Bouillard (*Genèse et Evolution*, p. 80) reports that as a boy Barth did not like mathematics and physics. Presumably this is the origin of his later dislike of axioms and theorems. Far from regarding them as the ideal form of a science he speaks sarcastically: "this solemnly, 'the supreme claim which can be made on any science' " (p. 8). It is in this section that we find his most extreme statements against system. Let us note the detail.

"If theology allows itself to be called or calls itself a science, it cannot at the same time take over the obligation to submit to measurement by the canons valid for other sciences." Orthodox Protestants would of course agree, as said before, that theology cannot submit to the scientific canons acknowledged by Huxley, Pearson, or Feigl. But what if a different philosophy of science is adopted in which the other sciences submit to the canons of theology? This too would be system.

Barth faces this possibility with what scarcely amounts to more than a bare denial. "Likewise it cannot justify itself before the other sciences on the score of setting up for discussion on its own side a concept of science which does not exclude but includes a good theology" (p. 9). Far from admitting even the possibility that the norms of theology might control the other sciences, the denial in this sentence is all the stronger because it envisages the placement of all sciences, theology included, on the same level. That is to say, even their co-ordination is denied. Like the majority of secular scientists Barth views their subordination to theology as ridiculously unimaginable. "To put itself in a

systematic relationship with other sciences, theology would have to regard its own special existence as fundamentally necessary. That is exactly what it cannot do." To the modern mind Barth is right; but a more skeptical view of the amount of truth obtainable by experimentation, with the help of operationalism, might bring the idea of subordination back again within the limits of possibility. The Scripture is a better source than experimentation is for the norms of ethics and politics; perhaps there is some way to bring physics and zoology also under this authority.

But why does Barth so bluntly rule out this possibility? Since he holds a less skeptical view of science than that offered in this criticism, one might suppose that he accepts nineteenth century mechanism as true and on this basis denies that theology can be given a fundamental position in human knowledge. But such is not the case. When he says, "That is exactly what it cannot do," he immediately adds as his reason, "It absolutely cannot regard itself as a member of an ordered cosmos, but only as a stop-gap in an unordered one." This reply could hardly have been anticipated.

From any professedly Christian point of view it is difficult to maintain that the cosmos is unordered; and for a Reformed theologian this is about the poorest reply possible. Calvinism strenuously insists upon the eternal all-comprehensive plan of God, in which neither a hair of one's head nor a dead sparrow lies outside the foreordained order. Equally impossible in Calvinism is the notion that theology is a stop-gap, a makeshift, a temporary expedient to be discarded at the first opportunity. And if God orders the world, and if the world is as God orders it to be, then the science of physics, whether operational or descriptive of nature, must be subsumed under theology in an ideally unified system. This ideal does not "founder" on the "general objection . . . that the abnormality of the peculiar status of theology is thereby overlooked." Reformed theology does not concede that it is abnormal. Nor is the result "the disturbing, in fact destructive, surrender of theology to the general concept of science, and the mild inattention with which non-theological science—possibly with a better nose for actualities than theologians who thirst for syntheses—is wont to reply to this particular mode of justifying theology" (pp. 9-10). Here we might make bold to remind Barth that it is not only theologians who thirst for synthesis. The Logical Positivists do too; and no justification of theology on the ground that the cosmos is dis-

jointed, with one area reserved for theology and all the rest abandoned to science, is going to impress them, any more than it will impress a Calvinist. To be sure, if it needs to be said again, a surrender of theology to the general concept of science as presently acknowledged by atheistic philosophers is obviously destructive. Here Barth is on solid ground. But his further inference that the integration of science and theology is evil on any presupposition is invalidly drawn.

There are other considerations which lend plausibility to Barth's view. The arrangement of true propositions into a system of axioms and theorems has never been accomplished in theology. It has never been accomplished in zoology either. Only in geometry, not even in arithmetic, and possibly in mechanics has the ideal of axiomatization been brought to actuality. Hence two possibilities are open. If zoology is a science, and if zoology is not in geometrical form, then axiomatization is not a norm of science and should not have been included in the list; but if not so included, it cannot be a reason for separating theology from the recognized sciences. Or, if axiomatization is a norm, the actual failure to axiomatize theology does not exclude it from the general concept of science any more than the actual failure to axiomatize zoology excludes zoology.

For these various reasons Barth's treatment of the relation between theology and science, of his method or refusal to face the outside world, must be adjudged confused.

Fortunately his actual procedure is inconsistent with and better than his theory. While he never succeeds in arranging all theological truths in the form of axioms and theorems, he clearly operates with this as a goal. And in doing so, he will be commended by all consistent Calvinists.

For example, his treatment of the Trinity (especially I 1, pp. 433-435) falls just a little short of making this doctrine the axiom on which all other dogmatics is built. Or, more accurately, the event of revelation is the axiom from which the doctrine of the Trinity is the first theorem. "The question answered by the doctrine of the Trinity is a definite question regarding the fundamental concept, or the fundamental fact attested in Scripture, of the revelation of God" (I 1, p. 436; cf. p. 418). And again, "the statement about the divinity of Christ is to be regarded not as a derivative, but as a fundamental statement" (*ibid.*, p. 475). Now, there may be a little hesitation in selecting revelation, the Trinity, or the divinity of Christ (*cf.* IV 2, p.

655) as the basic axiom, but a distinction between derivative and fundamental statements implies some sort of axiom-theorem arrangement. This conclusion is supported also by saying that *Deus dixit* is axiomatic (I 2, p. 57). Barth also argues that a rejection of revelation "would mean that before revelation and even apart from it we are already informed, and are thereby able . . . even to dispose of revelation" (*ibid.*, p. 63). These lines in effect deny naturalistic axioms and seem to make the fact of revelation Barth's axiom: do they not say that we have no information prior to revelation? Later he speaks about "the axiomatic character of the statement" (p. 72), and "to indicate the axiomatic character of the statement that Christ was manifested as the Expected One . . ." (p. 74). Or, again, in the eighteenth century "it was not what theology did that was serious. It was what it did not do: its weakness and vacillation in the very substance of faith. In fact and in practice it ceased to regard the cardinal statements of the Lutheran and Heidelberg confessions as definite axioms" (I 2, p. 293). Strange as it may seem to any who expect perfect consistency in Barth, he here brands as the sin of unbelief that precisely which in the beginning he declared theology must do if it is not to be destroyed. In those passages also, and there are several, where Barth warns against proving, justifying, or demonstrating a certain item, the warning can be well taken only if the item is axiomatic—unless one is willing to consider the possibility of truths totally unrelated to all other truths. Thus the authority of Scripture, by this implication, is axiomatic (I 2, pp. 460-461). Later, "For the statement that the human word of the Bible is the word of God we can give only a single and incomparable basis. This is that it is true. This basis either exists of itself or not at all. It is either already known and acknowledged or it is not accepted" (*ibid.*, pp. 535-536). Is not this plainly the axiomatic method? The note on pages 536-537 commends Calvin for accepting the Scripture on the testimony of the Holy Spirit and not on certain secondary grounds. Those who have been inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit, says Calvin, find the Scripture "self-authenticating, carrying with it its own evidence, so that it ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason . . . We seek not arguments or probabilities to support our judgment . . ." (Institutes I vii 5). Now, since the testimony of the Spirit is not a subjective experience, but, as Ritschl rightly saw even if only to reject it, the conviction of truth by the operation of a power independent of the believer, the position of Scripture in the formulation of theology must be that of an axiom.

However, after all this, much to one's disappointment, Barth on the same page remembers his original view that any attempt to systematize theology leads to its destruction. Note how he answers Strauss. Strauss had argued against making the testimony of the Spirit and the authority of Scripture the basis of all theology by asking, "Who can now attest the divinity of this witness?" This he called "the 'Achilles heel' of the Protestant system." Barth seemingly approves of the question, but replies "What Strauss failed to see is that there is no Protestant system." Would it not have been better to reply that Calvinism is a system, that every system is based on undemonstrable axioms, and that to insist that all propositions be demonstrable is an unreasonable, indeed an irrational, demand?

The foregoing discussion concerning the relation between theology and other areas of human knowledge, with its quotations from later pages, has been based mainly on the opening section of *Church Dogmatics*. This part of the discussion may now be brought to an end by considering Barth's threefold conclusion.

Science, Theology, and the Church

Having rejected the demand that theology redefine science so as to bring some unity into the sphere of knowledge and having defended this rejection on the ground that "no science possesses manorial rights to the name," Barth states three conclusions which are not entirely consistent with all he has said. They concern the practical interests served by designating theology a science.

The first advantage of calling theology a science is the encouragement of humility. By this designation "theology brings itself into line; as a human effort after truth, it confesses its solidarity with other efforts of this kind . . . enters a protest against the conception that it is raised ontologically above these others . . . and reminds itself of the fact that it is only a 'science,' and so of the 'profaneness' with which it too, on its relatively special path, does its work even in the most exalted regions" (I 1, p. 10).

Perhaps theologians need to be reminded that they are not inspired prophets. But contrary to the argument of its immediately preceding pages this first conclusion asserts the solidarity of theology and other sciences and places them all under one "kind" or genus. In consistency this requires the formulation of a philosophy of science with a definition quite different from that of the Logical Positivists. Then too this

conclusion denies, what the criticism in the present chapter asserts, that theology is superior to other sciences. Just what implications are buried in the term "ontologically" is difficult to say. Barth cannot mean to deny that God, the object of theology, is ontologically superior to the objects of other sciences. Could he possibly mean that the object of theology is merely *language* about God and not language about *God*, and so turn theology into a division of linguistics? One would hesitate so to empty theology of its theological meaning. He probably means no more than that theology is as much a human endeavor as is physics. But this uncontested fact would not necessarily put both sciences on the same level. Then finally Barth refers to the "relatively special path" of theological work. But if its path is only relatively special, the same redefinition and philosophy of science is called for. Barth's position therefore is not completely consistent on this point.

The second conclusion is that by a refusal to abandon the concept of "science" to the other sciences, theology enters a protest against the "heathen" concept of science. By having a department of theology in the University a salutary reminder is given the secular scientists "that the quasi-religious unconditionality of their interpretation of this concept is in practice not undisputed, that the tradition beginning with the name of Aristotle is at all events but one among others, and that, once for all, the Christian Church at least does not have Aristotle for its ancestor." What wise words these are, and how pertinent! Particularly in the United States, if not in Europe, a great deal of academic work is carried on as if Christian theology had no right to exist. The thought should be extended. This rebuke to the arrogance of omniscient irreligionists should be implemented by the formulation of a comprehensive world-view. Unfortunately, Barth sometimes disparages world-views; but here the relevance of the Reformed faith to all phases of life receives strong support.

Like the others the third conclusion also requires a revised and unified view of science. Theology is said to be included "practically" under the name of science "in spite of the fundamentally irremovable difference in its understanding of this concept." But there is a further difficulty in this third conclusion. By including itself among the sciences, Barth writes, theology "proves . . . that it does not take their heathen character so seriously as to separate itself from them in a superior manner under another name; that rather in spite of their

denial of the theological task and in spite of their concept of science being so intolerable to theology, it reckons them with itself in the Church" (I 1, p. 11; cf. also the Festschrift on Heinrich Barth). Had Barth previously allowed theology to purge science of its heathen accretions and to reconstruct it all on a Christian foundation, there could be no objection to the inclusion of the other sciences, along with theology, in the Church. But since this was not Barth's intention, it is heathen science itself, with its intolerable definition and its claim to be the sole gateway to all knowledge, that Barth now brings into the Church.

Barth's concept of the Church is a strange one, and in view of later developments something may well be said on the subject at this convenient point. The preceding and the present chapters have already noted certain peculiarities. In the discussion on modernism Barth objected to the discarding of the Bible by Ritschl and Harnack "and many recent fools in Germany" on the ground that in so doing they were founding a new Church. Doubtless this is true, but the first pages of the present chapter pointed out the weakness of this *ad hominem* argument. It was also seen that Barth deliberately preferred the title *Church Dogmatics* to Christian Dogmatics. The title chosen, says Barth, emphasizes the circumstance that dogmatics is not a "free" science, but one that is bound to the Church. But the rejected title would have bound dogmatics to Christianity as opposed to Islam, and Biblical Dogmatics would have bound it to the Bible. If dogmatics is not to be free, why should the Church rather than the Bible be indicated as its bond? Now that Barth has included heathen science in his Church, an inclusion that makes heathen science part of dogmatics' limitations, one naturally asks, What is the Church?

The question may be made more definite by asking, Who is the Church? In his *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* Barth offers us Rousseau, Lessing, Kant, and even Feuerbach as Protestant theologians. That these men influenced the visible Church and the professed theologians is indubitable. But this is not the sole reason Barth included them in Protestant Thought. The *Introduction* to the German edition says, "I believe one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. And if I seriously intend to listen to a theologian of the past—whether it be Schleiermacher or Ritschl or anyone else—then I must mean this 'I believe' seriously . . . That is, regardless of my thousand reasons, I must include these people in the Christian Church . . .

I have no right to deny or even doubt that they were as fundamentally concerned as I am about the Christian faith."¹ If, now, the selection of the names of Schleiermacher and Ritschl or "anyone else" is a selection from the table of contents, then Rousseau, Lessing, Kant, and even Feuerbach are included in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Though Barth says we dare not doubt this, it is not likely that Luther and Calvin would have agreed. Some of these men may have had their names on the rolls of a careless or corrupt organization that called itself a Church, but there are a thousand good reasons for doubting, if not denying, that Rousseau and Feuerbach were members of the *unam sanctam*. Barth's procedure is backwards. He assumes that a writer is a member of the Church and concludes that we must take him seriously and sympathetically. Would not the proper procedure be to study his writings and determine whether or not he is a Christian, and then take him, seriously perhaps, but sympathetically or unsympathetically as the case requires? Barth hardly compliments himself by supposing that Feuerbach was as fundamentally concerned—in a positive way—about the Christian faith as he is.

If, now, heathen science with its intolerable claims is also included in the Church, one must wonder whether there is any real distinction between the Church and the world. Bringing everybody and everything into the Church would of course remove the difficulty of addressing the outside world. There would be no outside. But otherwise what has church membership and the forgiveness of sins to do with the question of the relation between Dogmatics and science? Maybe Schleiermacher, if not Feuerbach, was a true, though misguided, Christian. Does this support the three conclusions Barth draws? Argu-

¹ Credo unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam; und wenn es mir ernst ist, einen Theologen der Vorzeit, heisse er nun Schleiermacher oder Ritschl oder wie er wolle, zu hören, dann muss es mir mit diesem Credo, wenn ich nicht durch individuelle Inspiration des Gegenteils davon dispensiert ist, konkreter Ernst sein, d.h. dann habe ich diese Leute all meiner tausend Gründe ungeachtet zur christlichen Kirche zu rechnen und eingedenk dessen, dass ich selber samt meiner theologischen Arbeit nur auf Grund von Vergebung in der christlichen Kirche bin, ihnen das, dass es ihnen wie mir im Grunde um den christlichen Glauben gegangen sei, weder abzustreiten, noch auch nur es anzuzweifeln. Wenn es in Wirklichkeit anders wäre und ich sie aufgenommen habe, als ob es doch so wäre, so wird das mein Schaden sicher nicht sein: worin sie teilweise oder gänzlich geirrt und gefehlt haben, das wird gerade auf dem Boden dieses 'Als-Ob' von selbst als solches an den Tag kommen und mich zu verführen nicht imstande sein. Wohl aber könnte es mein und nicht nur mein Schade sein, wenn es in Wirklichkeit doch so wäre, und ich habe mich, von meinen tausend Gründen geleitet, ihnen gegenüber verhalten, wie es anders wäre, weil ich dann in ihnen die Kirche, die ich hören sollte, nicht gehört habe (p. 14).

ment and a thousand reasons seem to lead to three different conclusions. First, rationality, which is indispensable to all exchange of ideas, requires a unification of the sciences. Second, since modern scientism cannot supply its own norms, theology should redefine science and rule as queen. Third and last, these two conclusions necessitate attention to axiomatization, permit a direct confrontation with the outside world, and among other things require a great trust in the law of contradiction, about which more will be said.

IV

PROLEGOMENA AND APOLOGETICS

In an effort to discover the main lines of Barth's apologetics, or, as it actually turned out, in an effort to discover whether Barth's views provide for discussion with the outside world, the previous chapter studied his introductory statement on the relation of theology to science or secular learning. Now we must proceed to his elaboration of these principles. The problems of apologetics are exceedingly intricate, and Barth's handling of them, with his polemics against Emil Brunner, does not simplify things in the least. A critic's analysis of all this only adds a second layer of complexity. Therefore, as one is never sure of not getting lost in the woods, even when following a blazed trail, so here in this analysis, with one turn after another, a statement of the conclusion at the beginning will serve as a compass for the general direction. The conclusion is that on the main point Barth is to be applauded. At the same time, however, certain inconsistencies in his exposition lead him unnecessarily to reject suggestions that would not harm and might even improve the application of his basic principle. But the student must patiently tread the path step by step. The path leads through section two: *The Task of Prolegomena to Dogmatics*.

Is Apologetics Possible?

"Prolegomena to a science . . . will always consist mainly in reflections and statements as to how knowledge is reached in the science in

question." In theology one of the preliminary questions has often been, Is God knowable? The question is usually answered by an account of the required methodology. But Barth points out a still prior question: In Dogmatics is prolegomena necessary? The great dogmatists in the ancient and medieval Church were content with the briefest reflections. Nor is the absence of prolegomena a sign of a naive attitude: it can be the result of a well-thought-out decision that prolegomena is unnecessary. Yet this is not now the usual view. From time to time the ever changing situation in the Church imposes special conditions on work in theology. Once the Trinity was the pressing problem; today dogmatics is required to explain its methodology. On what grounds therefore, asks Barth, and this is the decisive question, can we acknowledge the demand and regard prolegomena as essential?

The answer ordinarily given is the one Barth cites from Brunner: "The point today is not the way in which God exists, but whether he exists, not what is revealed, but whether there is such a thing as revelation, not rationalistic destructiveness at isolated points, but the doubts cast upon the miracle of revelation as such; the distinctive marks of all Christian theology, the norm, the concept of revelation, not its contents, and so the problem of intellect and revelation is the issue at stake" (I 1, p. 28). Or in Barth's own words, "The task of theology would then consist in the 'struggle against the self-assurance of the modern spirit,' the struggle against 'reason's axiom of the final reality of reason,' in 'wrestling to a fall with this exclusive and therefore anti-Word reason,' and in 'liberating reason, the intellect, which amid the delusion and loneliness of its own nature, secretly longs for the divine Thou!'"

That Barth is on the side of revelation against naturalism, rationalism, and paganism is quite clear; and to this extent he could not or ought not be greatly opposed to apologetics, prolegomena, or eristics as Brunner terms it. But Barth has a complaint against contemporary methods. He writes, "There is, however, it is held, a 'point of connection for the divine message in man,' undestroyed by sin, a 'questioning after God,' natural to man" (p. 29). Brunner identifies this point of connection as "that awareness of himself, which man may have as a non-believer and which as such is taken up into belief." On the face of it this seems to be the innocuous idea that Nicodemus, for example, was aware that he was Nicodemus before he was born again, and that after he was born again he was still aware that he was Nicodemus. If such were the intention, no one could object; but unfortunately this

interpretation of Brunner's words does not indicate any point of connection between God's message and an unbeliever. To serve this purpose, Barth adds, still quoting Brunner, "one would have 'to show how through the Word of God the human reason is partly unveiled as a source of error inimical to life, partly fulfilled in its own unachievable search.'" Brunner's apologetics therefore depends on an alleged propensity of man's natural reason to accept the Gospel, a point of contact between man and God, a similarity between the human mind and the divine Word. Barth denies this point of contact. He gives three reasons, which we shall now consider, against basing the necessity for apologetics on this ground. And it must also be determined whether he admits any ground or possibility of apologetics at all.

Barth's first reason is that the denial of the miracle of revelation, which according to Brunner characterizes the present day in contrast to the earlier ages of the Church, is not something recent which now for the first time demands a new method. The twentieth century is no more dangerous for faith than the eighteenth was; the Middle Ages had their enlighteners, atheists, and secularists; and can the situation in antiquity, asks Barth, with its pagan gods and revelations, thus forming a pointed contrast with the contemporary denial of all revelation, be thought advantageous to the defense of the Christian revelation? This "could be conceded only if revelation as believed in by the Church were regarded as a special case within the genus 'revelation as a whole and in general.' . . . [But] knowledge of the revelation believed in by the Church neither stands nor falls by general religious possibility, made easy by the ancient and difficult by the recent view of the world" (I 1, p. 30).

Here Barth has made a capital point. Certainly it is repugnant to classify Isaiah and Paul with the oracle at Delphi or with African witch doctors and so place them on the same level. In religion and intellectual affairs, as is not the case in war and politics, one alien system cannot be chosen as an ally in order to defeat a second enemy. But true and important as this principle is, the very fact that it applies at all times, in all ages, against all enemies, as Barth himself insists in his opposition to Brunner, neither justifies the scantiness of apologetics in the Middle Ages nor serves as a reason for belittling prolegomena and methodology today. It applies to Brunner only to the extent that Brunner may consider the present situation to be completely and

fundamentally different from the past. If, on the other hand, Christianity faces essentially the same problems in all ages, there still may be special conditions in the twentieth century that make apologetics a more pressing need now than in the Middle Ages. Whether or not Barth's objection has any force against Brunner, it is inapplicable as a general objection to apologetics, even though the Word of God is not a species of a genus.

The second reason Barth rejects Brunner's ground for asserting the necessity of prolegomena, if not the necessity itself, is that a cross-examination of secular views leads away from rather than into dogmatics. Dogmatics measures the language of the Church by the measure of revelation. But the language of the Church about God is the language, and Barth seems to mean the product, of the faithless and anti-faith reason of man. Therefore dogmatics is throughout a discussion between natural reason and revelation. Apparently this fact is supposed to remove all necessity for any prolegomena distinct from dogmatics itself because the discussion takes place in the Church. Its interest is not in discovering a point of connection between the divine message and man, but purely in expounding the message itself. Dogmatics cannot ask the question, "How is human knowledge of revelation possible? (as if it were a question whether revelation is known! as if it were to be expected from an investigation of human knowledge that we would see into the possibility of knowing divine-revelation!)" But it runs, What is man's real knowledge of divine revelation? (the presupposition being that revelation creates the needful 'point of connection' in man, itself and on its own initiative). Displace this relation, make the contradiction of reason as such the object of investigation and the conquest of it as such the goal, and at once you quit the sphere of the Church; in fact 'another task' is put in the place of the task of dogmatics" (I 1, p. 30).

There are several perplexities in this paragraph, but at this early stage only three preliminary questions will be asked. First, why must the language of the Church be the language of the anti-faith reason of man? Is it because speech itself is a poor instrument for revelation? Or is it because the Church uses concepts borrowed from secular philosophy?

Next, if it be granted that the discussion between natural reason and revelation takes place in the Church, rather than between the Church and the outside world, there arises again the earlier question

about the extent of the Church. Is there an outside world at all? Could there be, if Rousseau and Feuerbach are also in the Church? In this case it would be impossible to quit the sphere of the Church. And with heathen science in the Church too, why should not dogmatics converse with it?

Then, in the third place, there is the "point of connection." Now, it will appear in the sequel that this phrase is ambiguous. Two different sorts of thing might serve this purpose. The rejection of the one does not entail the rejection of the other; and whether or in what sense revelation creates the needful point of connection must also be clarified. In either case it is hard to say that dogmatics should take no interest in discovering such a point. Could not the nature of such a point be itself a part of the divine message?¹ And if so, prolegomena would lead into rather than away from dogmatics.

With respect to the possibility and nature of apologetics, regarded as the Christian reply to secular science, there are three positions to choose from. First, it may be asserted that Christianity has no need to concern itself with worldly learning, that there is no connection between them, that apologetics is impossible, and that dogmatics is self-sufficient. Sometimes Barth seems to take this position. In the second place, apologetics may be conceived along the lines of natural theology. The proper and valid deductions from astronomy, physics, zoology, and the ordinary sciences, so it would be held, do not lead to atheistic scientism but, quite the opposite, prove the existence of God and prepare for the acceptance of revealed truth. In this view dogmatics and apologetics would be distinct subjects, even if they overlapped at one point. This is the view of Thomas Aquinas and of some Protestant theologians; but it is definitely not the position of Karl Barth.

The third view, in opposition to the first, asserts that apologetics is possible and has a great deal to say to the outside world; but in opposition to the second view it denies that apologetics and dogmatics are really distinct subjects. With an emphasis on the ideal of axiomatization it would strive to systematize all knowledge on the basis of revealed principles. Some things Barth says could be developed in this direction. Although it would require Barth to retract his complaint that apologetics leads away from dogmatics and substitutes a different task, this third view would rule out all independent apologetics, as

¹ cf. A. p. 87, where Barth himself seems to make this suggestion.

Barth desires, and would be consistent with his entire attack on modernism. If it also envisages a message which in its implications is more extensive and more directly a reply to secularism than some dogmatists have supposed, Barth ought not to object too greatly. Then too, this view favors a particular material point that Barth repeatedly stresses. In opposition to the usual secular procedure of judging the possibility of God, revelation, and miracles by the norms of non-revelational philosophy, Barth insists that possibility is to be measured by actuality. Barth's phrase is perhaps not altogether accurate, for it might suggest that God cannot do anything more than he has already done. It would be better to say that past and future actualities are not to be denied on the ground of a limited and irrelevant concept of possibility. Specifically, if the Virgin Birth actually occurred in the past, and if Christ is actually to return in the future, these events cannot be judged impossible on grounds restricted to the present. Now, since Barth definitely rejects the second view of apologetics, we must ask which of the other two he accepts. We must also ask which we ourselves prefer. The first seems implausible because it leaves the Church with nothing to say to the general public; the third may seem too ideal and unrealistic; but no fourth possibility comes to mind. We must therefore continue with Barth's criticism of Brunner.

The third and last reason Barth gives for opposing Brunner's concept of apologetics is hardly less tangled than the second. The certainly desirable approach of dogmatics to unbelievers, says Barth, is not secured by Brunner's attempt at "smashing the axiom of reason." Dogmatics can demonstrate its responsibility and meet contemporary thought only by refusing to discuss its own basis, refusing to discuss such questions as whether God exists and whether there is a revelation. To achieve its end, dogmatics must be "actually on the spot, as the witness of faith against unbelief." It must oppose unbelief all along the line and all along the line the language must be apologetic and polemical. "There has never been any other effective apologetic and polemic of faith against unbelief than the unintended one (impossible to intend! purely experimental!) which took place when God himself sided with the witness of faith" (*ibid.*, p. 31).

Barth gives three reasons why all intended apologetics have been invariably and notoriously irresponsible and ineffective: (a) Such apologetics "must take unbelief seriously and itself not quite seriously . . . What unbelief expects of faith is purely . . . that it should be an

event. . . . But in 'discussion' with unbelief faith is certainly not an event. Does not the article on the forgiveness of sins already forbid a dialogue in which the partner . . . is addressed as a child of the world and is apprehended in his unbelief? Do we expect in this way even apagogically to be able to instruct him as to the wrongness of his prejudices against faith?" (b) Independent apologetics assumes, as Karl Heim puts it, that enough dogmatic textbooks have been written and that instead of working further on the matter itself, we should talk with other people about the matter. (c) Conversely, independent apologetics might lead to the notion that dogmatics itself has already left behind all discussion with unbelief and may continue esoterically, ignoring the standing menace to all its pronouncements. Therefore, concludes Barth, if theology is effectively apologetic, it is so because its distinctive work, taking place only amid the battle between faith and unbelief, is blessed by God. Effectiveness is not to be referred to deceiving the opponent by alleging common presuppositions, nor to revealing that it is not itself on the spot if it really accepts common presuppositions. "Apologetics and polemics can only be an event, they cannot be a program" (*ibid.*, p. 32-33).

First of all, in these lines it is to be noted that, however much Barth sometimes seems to deny all obligation to answer the unbelieving world, he here calls a meeting between dogmatics and unbelievers desirable. But Brunner's method of "smashing the axiom of reason" is not the way to go about it. Why? Is it because Brunner's phrase reflects some form of contemporary irrationalism, derived from Kierkegaard and used as a refuge from an Hegelian type system? Brunner, at least in some places, overworked the notion of paradox to the destruction of rationality and intellectualism.¹ But if a rejection of logic results in the murder of Hegel, it all the more results in the suicide of Brunner. Without the law of contradiction conversation cannot continue.

However, there is a second sense that can be attached to "smashing the axiom of reason." Even if Brunner impugns the laws of logic, the phrase could refer to "the struggle against 'reason's axiom of the final reality of reason, . . . therefore anti-Word reason.'" That is to say, "smashing the axiom of reason," instead of being taken as a limitation on logic, could be understood to refer merely to a refutation of non-Christian philosophies.

¹ Paul King Jewett, *Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation*, especially the thrust on p. 178.

In which of these two senses does Barth understand and oppose Brunner's phrase? He cannot consistently oppose a limitation on logic, for he himself has already accepted a certain limitation. On the other hand, can any Christian theologian object to smashing the "anti-Word reason" of naturalistic humanism? In approaching unbelief, which Barth here declares desirable, must not something be said to overthrow or replace empirical philosophy, verification principles, or whatever is the basis of secularism? Has not Barth gone too far?

To say that dogmatics should refuse to discuss its own basis is, if taken literally, an unfortunate recommendation. Possibly, however, Barth's words are more at fault than his thought. Barth himself does not absolutely refuse to discuss whether God exists: he wrote a book on Anselm's ontological argument. What he must mean, or what a Calvinist hopes he means, is that God and his revelation, not the data of experience, are the axioms of Christian thinking. As axioms or first principles, they cannot be deduced from prior knowledge. Christianity like every other system is based on indemonstrable axioms. Refusal to deduce them, however, is somewhat different from refusal to discuss them. And because, ideally at least, the truths of Christianity may be ordered logically, Barth is entirely correct in insisting that dogmatics oppose unbelief "all along the line," to use that favorite phrase of his. Necessarily it is polemical in every part.

But whether the only effective apologetic is the unintended one, when God sides with the witness, calls for a further distinction. If by effective apologetics Barth means the testimony of a human witness which is actually followed by the conversion of an unbeliever, he is thoroughly Reformed in referring this acceptance of the message to the supernatural act of God. Only God can remove unbelief, change a man's heart and mind, and give him faith. For this purpose human effort is totally ineffective. But is this precisely the question that we should put in apologetics? In discussing whether dogmatics needs prolegomena, as in discussing what to preach in next Sunday's sermon, the fact of effectual calling is not quite the point. For the sermon we ask, What topic will be appropriate? not whether it is God or the preacher who produces the effect. Similarly with apologetics the question is whether there is a set of truths and arguments which are valid against the errors and arguments of secular systems. Whether, when, and how these truths produce conviction in individual cases is altogether another matter. Barth seems to have changed questions in the middle of the stream. Therefore, while it may be admitted that all

intended apologetics is ineffective in this personal sense, it by no means follows that all such is notoriously irresponsible.

Consider Barth's three sub-points: (a) All intended apologetics, he claimed, must take unbelief seriously and itself not quite seriously. Now, of course, if an apologetic effort takes its faith "not quite seriously," something is wrong with that type of effort. The remedy is obviously to adopt another type, but a type which also takes unbelief seriously. Why should not a Christian apologete take unbelief seriously? Perhaps if everybody is going to be saved anyway, there is no ground for taking unbelief seriously; but then there would also be no good reason for writing immense volumes on Church Dogmatics. If, on the other hand, God's wrath will be meted out unpleasantly to unbelievers, then unbelief is serious and apologetes should so take it. At this point someone is sure to say that Barth places another meaning on the word "seriously," so that the criticism does not apply. "Seriously" must mean that the apologete seriously doubts the Word of God and seriously considers unbelief to be true. If this is really Barth's meaning—and we cannot be sure because he does not explain what he means—he has indeed escaped the present criticism, but only at the expense of asserting something false. There is no reason at all for insisting that an intended apologetic necessarily considers unbelief true.

Next, how does Barth know that unbelief expects faith to be an "event" rather than a discussion? The distinction itself is unclear. Ordinarily a discussion would seem to be as much an event as the discovery of America. But if there be some distinction between the two, an apologete who has done considerable arguing with unbelievers would conclude that it is discussion that they expect. They assuredly do not expect the event of conversion.

And why the article on the forgiveness of sins forbids a dialogue with a child of the world apprehended in his unbelief is a question that neither apostolic precept nor practice can answer. On the contrary, the Christian witness, when talking with an educated sinner, legitimately expects "to instruct him as to the wrongness of his prejudices against faith." What is the duty of the Christian evangelist? It is to teach all nations the things that Christ commanded, i.e., to preach the Gospel. Whether nations and individual people believe the good news depends, as was said, on the irresistible grace of God. But the fact that it is the Spirit who gives faith in no wise contradicts the necessity of preaching the Gospel. A sinner cannot accept a message he has

never heard, as Paul plainly told us in Romans 10:14. But can the message be presented in any thorough and intelligible way without mentioning the unbeliever's prejudices and difficulties?

Now, there is a great deal to be said in favor of preaching the elements of the Gospel and refusing to discuss pagan philosophies. The danger of philosophic discussion, however, is not that unbelief is taken seriously. The danger is that argument, because it is a highly enjoyable contest of wits, may become just a game in which unbelief is not taken seriously. Barth envisages the wrong danger. At the same time, since God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform, a pagan philosopher may come to believe the Gospel without being subjected to any intellectual refutation of his own system. But this surely does not happen in every case; very likely it hardly ever happens. Hence discussion of opposing axioms cannot be banned on principle.

Now, then, if apologetics has the task of discussing secular systems, is not the apagogic method the best—the method of *reductio ad absurdum*? Indeed the present analysis would like to place special emphasis on this important point. Since in this second half of the twentieth century Hegelianism is less vociferous than Logical Positivism, the latter will serve as a better example of how the method may be applied. Logical Positivism and the Oxford school of Analysis hold that religious statements are meaningless because they are not susceptible of sensory verification. Aside from formal tautologies, such as the principles of mathematics, no statement is meaningful (true or false), unless verifiable. But this axiom of verification reduces to absurdity because it violates itself. The principle is not subject to sensory confirmation and hence is nonsense. Granted, this is not all a Christian evangelist should say to a Logical Positivist; it is not all that he should say about Logical Positivism; but the apagogic method must remain the basic apologetic procedure.

Excursus. Now we interrupt the discussion of Barth's three sub-points against Brunner's concept of apologetics. The matter of *reductio ad absurdum*, conjoined as it is with the denial of a point of contact soon to be discussed, is so important that we must here summarize what Barth had said in his earlier work, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (pp. 55-72). The book is ostensibly an account of Anselm's theological method, and as such is a distinguished contribution to Medieval studies; but Barth is in such agreement with what he believes Anselm did that most of the book can be taken also as an expression of Barth's own views.

Traditionally Anselm has been understood to base his arguments for the existence of God, the necessity of the Incarnation, and the other articles of the Creed upon a common ground—propositions held in common by both Christian and unbeliever. On this interpretation he claims to have proved Christian truth by reason alone apart from any reliance on revelation. This traditional interpretation appeals to Anselm's own words.

In the Preface to *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm says of his book that "Leaving Christ out of view, as if nothing had ever been known of him, it proves by absolute reasons the impossibility that any man should be saved without him . . . it is moreover shown by plain reasoning and fact that human nature was ordained for this purpose." This proof is written out not only to gladden the hearts of believers but also to answer unbelievers who think that Christianity is contrary to reason. Anselm denies that his proof will consist of aesthetic appreciation of the beauty and harmony of God's plan; he aims at rational proof and necessity. The proof must be "reasonable and necessary," so as to convince one "unwilling to believe anything not previously proved by reason." At the end of the work Anselm's pupil gives this conclusion: "By this solution . . . I see the truth of all that is contained in the Old and New Testaments, for in proving that God became man by necessity, leaving out what was taken from the Bible, . . . you convince both Jew and pagan by the mere force of reason." Similarly in the *Monologium* Anselm writes, "in order that nothing in Scripture should be urged upon the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should, in an unadorned style, with common proofs and with a simple argument, be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason and plainly expounded in the light of truth."

Barth opposes the traditional interpretation, and although it is difficult to escape the force of Anselm's own statement of his aims, Barth is able to collect unexpected support for his novel interpretation. He can appeal to Anselm's actual procedure in the *Cur Deus Homo*, for Anselm does not in fact exclude Christ from view "as if nothing had even been known of him." On the other hand, both Anselm's stated aim and his actual procedure in the *Proslogium* agree with the traditional view. But in any case, the main interest here is not the Anselm of the eleventh century, but the *Anselm* of the twentieth, i.e., Barth.

Anselm's method, says Barth, is to take now this now that article of the Creed as an unknown x , to be solved or proved, not on the basis of a common ground with the unbeliever, but by means of articles of faith a , b , c , . . . assumed as known. For example, the presuppositions proving the necessity of the atoning death of Christ are: continuity between the divine purpose and the human race, man's obligation to obey God, his sin and guilt before God, his inability to save himself, and the "honor" of God. These are the a , b , c . . . which necessitate the Christological x .

Barth holds that Anselm used this method in the so-called ontological proof of God's existence also. "The dialogue form and the desire for proof

in no sense indicate that Anselm has accepted a position where faith and unbelief . . . have equal rights" (p. 60). Boso is not a heathen nor is Gaunilo an atheist. "Certainly not one of Anselm's writings appeals to us as being addressed directly to those outside, that is, as an apologetic in the modern sense. The readers whom he visualized and for whom he catered are the Christian theologians, or more exactly, the Benedictine theologians of his day" (pp. 62-63).

But Anselm had explicitly mentioned the Jew and the pagan. Did he not want to prove to them, rather than to the Benedictine monks, the rationality of the Christian faith? Barth correctly asserts that "they want to know about this *ratio* first before they believe it." But then he adds, "Clearly in this latter respect Anselm can have no desire to help them . . . Theology cannot anticipate the transformation of *insipiens* into *fidelis* . . . If that transformation did not take place . . . all that would remain between Anselm and his opponent would be a gulf (from each side of which two totally different things are being said in the same language), over which therefore neither help nor agreement is possible. The inexplicable possibility exists that the partner in discussion is and remains an *insipiens*, in which case all discussion with him is pointless and meaningless. Were Anselm to reckon *in concreto* with the givenness of this possibility, he could obviously do nothing but abandon the attempt (A. pp. 64-65).

Therefore Anselm's reason for arguing with the unbeliever, says Barth, is that in their questions both believer and unbeliever are seeking the same thing. They are both seeking the *ratio* of faith. "It is not the revelation itself that offends them—if that happened then of course they would be *insipientes* and beyond help . . . But . . . they do take offense at some constituent part of the revelation because the context, the totality of revelation, is unknown to them . . . [Thus] we can understand how he [Anselm] comes to engage in a discussion with him [the unbeliever] without either accepting the unbeliever's criterion, such as universal human reason, or stipulating that the unbeliever in order to become competent to discuss must first be converted into a believer" (A. pp. 66-67).

Parenthetically it may be noted that unbelievers like Huxley and Lamont are offended at revelation itself—not merely at some constituent part. If this was not true in the eleventh century, then Brunner's point that apologetics is especially needed today is well taken. But if it was true, if unbelievers in all ages have rejected revelation, if, as Barth maintains against Brunner, the earlier centuries were no more favorable to the Gospel than the twentieth, then how could Anselm and how can Barth argue with unbelievers?

"Anselm's proof works on the assumption that there is a solidarity between the theologian and the worldling . . . because he is determined to address the worldling as one with whom he has at least this in common—theology. . . . Thus there arises here a final enigma . . . Is he not deceiving himself when he thinks that his proofs could ever be understood by the unbelievers? . . . What kind of unbelievers could he have had in mind who

allow themselves to be transposed in this way *nolens volens* into the realm of theology? . . . And even at its best could the outcome of such instruction be anything but useless information about the inner consistency of Christian statements which would be completely incapable of preventing the person so informed from doubting, denying, and despising the whole thing as much as ever, and, with the whole thing, the details too?" (A. pp. 68-70).

This last is a most pertinent question. It is the question that must have been bothering every reader from near the beginning. One answer to it would be that such apologetics would indeed be nothing more than information about the inner consistency of Christian theology, but that this information is not useless. How it can be useful must of course be explained. But this is not the answer Barth gives. What he says is, "In the history of theology . . . the *via regia* of divine simplicity and the way of the most incredible deception have always run parallel, separated only by the merest hair's breadth. It can never be at all evident in any statement of any theologian whether it stands on this or that side of the boundary."

This answer is devastating, for it means not only that we have no reason to believe Anselm was right; it also means that it can never be evident on which side of the boundary Barth himself stands. What is worse, it means that neither the writer nor the reader of the present volume can have any confidence in his own judgment. Barth tries to escape the unpleasant force of his statement by drawing the conclusion that if no one can distinguish divine simplicity from incredible deception, then Anselm, in spite of appearances, might be correct. Of course he might; but so might Aquinas or Feuerbach. Since no statement is evident, everyone has an equal chance of being right and of being deceived. Theology becomes a futile occupation.

Barth wishes to save Anselm from such disaster. "Perhaps he was daring to assume that disbelief, . . . the doubt, denial, and derision of the unbeliever are not really to be taken so seriously as the unbeliever himself would take them . . . Perhaps he saw him standing at his side not only within the precincts of theology, but more important within the precincts of the Church" (A. p. 70). Once again therefore Barth tries to solve his problem by granting Church membership to the atheist of Psalm 14 along with Rousseau and Feuerbach. Truly, an ecumenical Church! Indeed, Barth himself says, "We must move on past the listener's tragic *non credo* to our task with a sense of humor" (A. p. 71).

Accordingly Anselm is said to have addressed the unbeliever as if he were a believer, as if he had not sinned, as if he were a Christian—"on the basis of the great 'as if' which is really not an 'as if' at all, but which at all times has been the final and decisive means whereby the believer could speak to the unbeliever" (A. p. 71). Thus, asserts Barth, apologetics cannot be apagogic (A. p. 67).

The excursus took off in the middle of a discussion of three sub-points. Next, in (b) Barth slips slightly into triviality. Without deny-

ing the propriety of advancing the study of theology and writing still more textbooks, we can also approve of talking with other people about as much of the matter as has already been worked out. The Church must engage in several forms of activity, and the selection of one of them cannot be made the denial of another.

Lastly, sub-section (c) argued that an independent apologetics would permit dogmatics to become "esoteric" and leave behind all discussion with unbelief. The sub-section also objected to deceiving an opponent by alleging common presuppositions. In addition to the reminder that axiomatization would rule out independence for apologetics, only one point needs mention. If apologetics is subject to the axioms of the Christian system, it will not deceive an opponent by alleging that it uses axioms which it has in common with secular thought. A point of connection in the sense of a common principle is a logical impossibility. But this is far from implying that apologetics can only be an event and not a program. The apagogic program has already been indicated; but more needs to be said about the point of connection.

The denial of a point of connection most naturally goes along with a refusal to discuss the philosophy of unbelief. Barth's position on unbelief is not clear. A few pages back Barth spoke of a connection between dogmatics and its unbelieving contemporaries as desirable. But there is a curious slant to it. As he proceeds Barth argues that "the necessity for dogmatic prolegomena, i.e., the necessity for giving an explicit account of the special path of knowledge to be trodden by dogmatics, must, to be authoritative, be an inner necessity, grounded in the thing itself" (I 1, p. 33). If this sentence means nothing more than that the propositions of apologetics must be deduced from the axioms of all dogmatics, there would be no objection from the standpoint of Reformed theology; this would simply be a repetition of the denial of an independent apologetic. But the paragraph develops a further idea. If this necessity, he continues, rests on a conflict, it must be a conflict of faith with itself. There is such a conflict, because there is a form of faith that lacks the content of faith, and it is called, not unbelief, but heresy. Heresy occupies a mid-position between faith and unbelief. It is the possibility of unbelief, but it is also a possibility of faith. "We might even say that unbelief in the form of heresy becomes an important matter for faith, a thing which it certainly is not as pure unbelief" (p. 34).

What does Barth mean here? Does he intend to distinguish heresy from unbelief and assert that dogmatics can speak to the former but not to the latter? The meaning is obscure. If there is a clear sharp line between heresy and unbelief, as the preceding quotation definitely implies, and if therefore the Church and the world are separate spheres, as Barth sometimes seems to deny, it still does not follow that pure unbelief is not an important matter for faith. Presumably Greek and Roman paganism was not heresy, yet the second and third century apologetes thought that their conflict with it was important. On the other hand, if there is no sharp line, if the sphere of the Church expands to include Kant, Herder, and Novalis, all the less can faith limit its conflict to something called heresy. But the passage before us seems to mean that faith has nothing to say to the outside world.

Barth further discloses his disinterest in unbelief in the note at the foot of the page. He remarks that from the time of the early Church, through the Middle Ages, and down to the period of Pietism and Enlightenment, "conflict with Jews, pagans, and atheists was purely incidental, pursued with nothing like the same emphasis and zeal as that against heretics" (p. 34). The direction of this zeal, even to the persecutions such as the extermination of the Albigenses, was sensible because the Church and the heretics really talked against each other on absolutely the same subject, whereas pure unbelief and faith merely talk past each other. Today, unfortunately, heresy and faith tolerate each other, i.e., freely and mutually leave one another to their fate; and thus the fellowship that had always been so faithfully preserved in persecution is now broken.

There is a good bit of truth in what Barth says. It is undoubtedly true that for many centuries conflict with the atheists, pagans, and Jews was not pressed so zealously as with the heretics. But Barth's explanation of this fact is not above suspicion. The apostolic Church, before A.D. 70, zealously pressed its mission to the Jews; and for centuries following it engaged in a vital and often fatal conflict with paganism. Raymond Lull, missionary and martyr of the early fourteenth century, is an example of the later concern for the Moslems. Now, if zeal against the "heretics" exceeded the interest in converting "unbelievers," the reason is to be sought in geographical and historical conditions, rather than in the alleged fact that faith and unbelief talk past each other about different objects. Let us always remember that Logical Positivism has very definite views about God, sin, and

salvation: they are nonsense and this sensory life is all and enough. When faith asserts the contradictory, the two types of thought are not talking past each other; they are meeting head on.

However, in spite of these introductory denials that faith need take unbelief seriously, Barth's practice is again better than his theory. In considering the Holy Spirit as the subjective possibility of revelation Barth includes a note on agnosticism. It is a good note, so far as it goes. It contrasts the vague "above," the knowledge of which agnosticism denies to us, with the living God and his active Spirit. Barth tells the agnostic that if he acknowledged the Holy Spirit "he would have to surrender his agnosticism all along the line" (I 2, p. 244). Now, it would seem desirable to say more to the agnostic in another context, but what is said here is nonetheless said to him and not spoken past him. In fact the procedure is, at least incipiently, apagogic. But still Barth apparently wishes to avoid too close a contact with unbelief, for he immediately adds the strange warning, "This incidental note has nothing to do with apologetics." Nothing?

Another passage, although still doubtful in its total import, nevertheless confronts unbelief somewhat more clearly and directly. Its very title is *Religion as Unbelief* (I 2, p. 297 ff.). The opening paragraph opposes the thesis of modernism that Christianity can be developed by refining some natural religion immanent in human nature. Then comes a most interesting note. "For a truly theological treatment of religion and religions the problem of *Nathan der Weise* is therefore pointless." Christian, Jew, and Moslem, as Lessing sees them, have no advantage over and no fault to find with one another. But Lessing's solution to their conflict, 'Let each be zealous for his uncorrupted, unprejudiced love,' will only lead them deeper into the conflict from the theological standpoint, for the conflict of religions arises from the very fact that each is striving after his love. Lessing did not see that after overcoming the half-hearted conflict, the conflict about eating and drinking and clothes, the conflict of religionism as social customs, as Saladin describes it, a genuine religious conflict might begin at a point lying quite outside the possibilities of his Templars and patriarchs. In addition to Barth's comments one might pursue Lessing in greater detail and itemize the lines of the drama in which the parallel between religions, especially Christianity, and the rings breaks down. For example, the story depends on the assumption that God lied to two of his three sons. Thus Lessing's

analysis of the situation can be shown to be fundamentally faulty. But even without such itemization, Barth's briefer procedure is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum*. Lessing's solution is absurd because it will engender what it was intended to prevent. Thus Barth proceeds apagogically, and in doing so has something to say to the outside world, for even though he includes Lessing in the Church, it is not plausible that Nathan and Saladin are members.

Another instance of Barth's address to the unbelieving world comes to light in the contrast he draws between Biblical hermeneutics and general or secular hermeneutics. In actual practice general hermeneutics does not regard its texts as the measure of possibility. That is, the fact that Homer's *Odyssey* narrates certain events does not prove that those events are possible. Of course, general hermeneutics admits that a text may alter the previously accepted picture of a given epoch, even radically. "But it holds fast all the more definitely to a certain preconceived picture of actual occurrence itself. It thinks it has a basic knowledge of what is generally possible, of what can have happened, and from this point of view assesses the statement of the text . . . Biblical hermeneutics, on the contrary . . . follows the path of strict observation to the very end. Certainly it does this because of its own definite presupposition. But it is to be noted that this presupposition does enable it to be consistent as hermeneutics. The same cannot be said of the presupposition of general hermeneutics" (I 2, p. 725). Here again, a Christian presupposition, first principle, or axiom produces logical consistency, while a secular presupposition can apagogically be shown to result in inconsistency. Barth's procedure is to be commended, even if some of his introductory statements cannot be.

Common Ground

If now Barth is willing, even hesitantly, to speak to and not merely past unbelief, and if a serious theologian ought to do so and ought to do so without hesitation, the discussion must return to "the point of connection" and connect it with the approach of an axiomatic dogmatics to the outside world.

From a previous passage we gathered that Brunner holds to the necessity of a "point of connection for the divine message in man." This "point of connection" presumably is needed in order for the Christian message to evoke a favorable or even a possible reaction in

the unbeliever. Without a point of intellectual contact no fruitful conversation could be carried on. How otherwise could argument and persuasion be effective? Brunner is not alone in thinking so. Modernism and Romanism as well agree with him. According to Thomas Aquinas sensation gives all men an immediate knowledge of things in motion; from this experience, without any supernatural aid, natural man can develop concepts and arguments that eventually demonstrate the existence of God; and being so convinced by his own reason the sinner is favorably inclined to receive the Gospel. While this Thomism embroiders fine scholastic distinctions, modernism paints with a broad impressionistic brush. But both depend on a point of contact in the natural reason of man. In opposition to all this that seems so plausible Barth holds that if theology really makes use of common presuppositions, it is descending the road toward atheistic humanism. On the other hand, if theology only pretends to use common presuppositions, it is engaging in deception. Therefore in this introductory section Barth gives the impression of discarding apologetics altogether.

There are also other passages where Barth expressly or by implication rejects the notion of a point of connection. As previously noted, his whole attack on modernism is based on this conviction, including the explicit denial in his answer to Gogarten of an independent theology, of a "common platform upon which to come to terms with the philosopher" (I 1, p. 148), and of "a way from anthropology to Christology." Then too, his discussion of the Trinity, though containing no explicit mention of a common ground, rules it out by implication. Here Barth will not have the first questions to be, How do we know God? Does God exist? What is God? and then only finally ask, Who is God? This order of questions directly contradicts the comprehensive significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, for only this doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes the Christian view of God from other non-Christian views. If we do not know God as Triune, we simply do not know God. "So long as theism 'only distinguishes God and the world and never God from God, it always stays caught in the reversion or transition to the pantheistic or other denial of absolute being. A perfect protection against atheism, polytheism, pantheism, or dualism, there can only be with the doctrine of the Trinity . . .'" (Quoted apparently with approval from C. J. Nitzsch; I 1, p. 347; cf. the strong statement by Bavinck which Barth immediately adds). The

implication is that a general theism, whether Thomistic or modernist, by reason of its common ground with pantheism cannot withstand pantheism. The trinitarian concept of God, on which the Christian must take his stand, has nothing in common with other views.

Three pages later there is a more clearly expressed paragraph. It comes as Barth seeks the root of the doctrine of the "Trinity in revelation. Admittedly Barth is not altogether consistent in the details of his thought. As was seen before, so here too it is not quite clear whether the doctrine of the Trinity is itself the original axiom or whether revelation is. But whichever of these two is chosen as prior to the other, the denial of a common platform with unbelief is unmistakable. Barth writes, "According to Holy Scripture God's revelation is a ground which has no sort of higher or deeper ground above or behind it, but is simply a ground in itself, and therefore, as regards man, an authority from which no appeal to a higher authority is possible. Its reality and likewise its truth do not rest upon a superior reality and truth . . . and so are also not measured by reality and truth such as might be found at such another point . . . On the contrary, God's revelation has its reality and truth wholly and in every respect—i.e., ontically and noetically—within itself" (*ibid.*, p. 350). Now, someone might object to asserting that revelation is ontically and not simply noetically the ultimate reality; one might prefer to say that the eternal God himself ontically precedes his acts of revelation in time. This objection may be a sound one; but it is beside the point here, for the central concern is simply to establish the fact that Barth rejects all common ground with unbelief.

Similarly later on Barth says, "It is quite essential to this human position of the knowledge of God bound to the Word of God that it cannot let its reality and possibility be questioned from without, that it can reply to such questions only by . . . allowing its own actuality to speak for itself . . . It is quite impossible to defend and maintain it unless we represent its reality and possibility from within outwards, and do not try to establish its reality and possibility from outside. 'From outside' means from the point of view of a human position where truth, dignity, and competence are so ascribed to human seeing, understanding, and judging as to be judge over the reality and possibility of what happens here" (II 1, pp. 30-31).

Appreciative mention ought to be made of Barth's constant denial of a common platform with other types of thought. No doubt as much

is implied in Calvin himself and in his consistent disciples. But to Barth belongs the credit of having generalized the principle and of having made it explicit. On this account Calvinistic theologians will for all future time be indebted to Karl Barth.

At the same time one may question whether Barth has succeeded in the proper application of his principle. A certain ambiguity in the concept of a common ground, evidenced by a variation of phrase, leads to its overextension in one direction and to its inconsistent curtailment in another.

First, of the several phrases used, common ground, point of connection, point of contact, common platform, common presupposition, the last two but especially the last is the least ambiguous. Ground, connection, and contact are vague. Platform and presupposition indicate the nature of the "ground" or "contact." It might be clearer to say "common axiom"; though Barth's unfortunate dislike for axiomatization has prevented him from using this clearest of all expressions. Axiomatization is simply the perfecting and exhibiting of the logical consistency of a system of thought. In view of Calvinism's well known reputation for consistency, axiomatization and Calvinism should get along well together. The many theorems would be derived from the smallest possible number of axioms. This ideal, which Barth rejects, most evidently rules out a common platform or common set of axioms with unbelief. And since the axioms, if there be several, depend for their meaning on their interrelationships, axiomatization would rule out the possibility of even a single axiom in common. Indeed, if axiomatization is rejected, how can a common proposition be effectively excluded? Is not axiomatization the only ideal that guarantees the independence of theology and apologetics?

Barth, however, is troubled by a dilemma. If on the one hand, faith tries to establish itself on a presupposition in common with general anthropology, the philosophy of history, or any other secular subject, faith will dissolve into humanistic unbelief. Barth's massive argument against modernism has thoroughly established this half of the dilemma. But on the other hand, if there is no common presupposition, and if theology can be based only on its own grounds or axioms, then apologetics must be apagogic, and the theologian can only engage in deception if he attempts a discussion with unbelief. Deceit or silence—that is the dilemma. To escape these equally sharp horns, Barth has rejected axiomatization, has sometimes denied the wisdom of

trying to talk to unbelievers, and has made apologetics an act of God. These are desperate expedients, and we have already seen that Barth's practice is often better than his theory. Hence instead of accepting Barth's expedients it is better to re-examine the dilemma.

The first half of the dilemma must be accepted; indeed one whose ideal is axiomatization accepts it more consciously and consistently than any one else. But it does not follow that apologetics must engage in deception. True, the procedure of *reductio ad absurdum* is slightly more complicated than what passes for straight-forward argument. Nearly all discussions among men are thought to proceed on common presuppositions. This is normally expected. And when a discussion does not so proceed, when it deliberately rejects common axioms, the one party may indeed be confused. But he need not be deceived. He must be given a lesson in geometry. The process of the *reductio* must be explained to him. There are two parts to the process. First the apologete must show that the axioms of secularism result in self-contradiction. On a previous page Logical Positivism's principle of verification was given as an example. Then, second, the apologete must exhibit the internal consistency of the Christian system. When these two points have been made clear, the Christian will urge the unbeliever to repudiate the axioms of secularism and accept God's revelation. That is, the unbeliever will be asked to change his mind completely, to repent. This type of apologetic argument neither intends deception nor does it deny that in fact repentance comes only as a gift from God.

A knowledge of geometry, of non-Euclidean geometries, contributes to the understanding of *reductiones ad absurdum* and the significance of alternate sets of axioms. But the force of geometric examples may be missed because the subject is limited. Geometry treats of space only; theology, the theology here in view, covers the entire field of human knowledge: anthropology, history, and science. The axioms desired are axioms which will control all thought. Had Barth pressed his original insight, he need not have taken secular science and general anthropology so much at face value. Too often he gives the impression that science has ruled out the Virgin Birth as biologically impossible, that higher criticism has succeeded in obscuring the events of Christ's life and in disproving many of the alleged facts of the Old Testament; but that this occurs only outside the Church, and we are inside the Church, and Church tradition is as respectable as Aristotel-

ian tradition. Thus the reader receives the doubtless unintended impression of a theory of twofold truth. But this is an impression that axiomatization never produces, whatever initial implausibility of its own it may have.

The initial implausibility of a thorough-going, all comprehensive system of axioms and theorems does not lie in the fact that it is a hitherto unrealized ideal. The implausibility rests on the contrast between the common opinion that the secular sciences are true, at least largely true, and the implication of Christian axiomatization that they are all completely false. Nor should this implausibility be disguised by assigning the sciences an independent truth outside the Church. General anthropology, Hegelian philosophy of history, hermeneutics and higher criticism are not independently true outside the sphere of the Church: they are false *simpliciter*. Faith does not have to shut itself up behind monastery walls and resign from the world at large. The axioms of faith are all-comprehensive and the sciences have no independent existence. This implausibility of theologizing arithmetic, chemistry, and biology, is, however, only initial. There is nothing more implausible in theologizing chemistry than there is in positivizing or hegelianizing it. Both are attempts to maintain the consistency of all truth. If the implausibility were read as an impossibility, one's world would be split in two, each with its own "truth," and each with its own schizophrenic logic.

Once or twice Barth recognizes the all-comprehensive character of truth. It was seen previously how he suggested that general hermeneutics should conform itself to Biblical hermeneutics. This is one step toward making theology Queen of the sciences. More explicit is another reference. "God is himself the truth. The truth—not simply a truth. For the origin and substance of all truth lies in the fact that God is not hidden from himself but is open to himself" (II 1, p. 68). This quotation and its context contain certain complexities that are not pertinent here; the present point is simply that God is the origin of all truth. Then all truth is one and self-consistent. But if so, non-Christian systems of thought must be false "all along the line."

Not far beyond this last reference the same thought recurs. The argument has to do with natural theology, and its details are here beside its point. But in the course of the argument Barth says that the witness of the Biblical witnesses "is not a kind of logically developed

human doctrine and theory which, like every human doctrine and theory, for all its logic can and necessarily will reveal at some point an hiatus and contain and tolerate its own contradiction within itself. The Biblical witness . . . does not spin out a human idea, alongside which other and contradictory ideas can and must have a place, as is the case with all human systems of thought" (II 1, p. 105). If this passage does not explicitly claim self-consistency for revelation, at least it states and repeats that human systems of thought, based on other presuppositions, necessarily fall into self-contradiction. Barth then continues by analyzing various Biblical phrases which have been interpreted as favorable to natural theology. In the course of this argument he emphatically denies that the prophets and apostles could have included in their message any elements derived from a non-revelational source. Although Barth stresses the fact that it was their commission which prohibited them from seeking other sources of knowledge, the vigor of the passage (II 1, pp. 108-110) seems to derive from the assumption that there is no other source. And in this case all truth is one, consisting of theorems based on axioms, all self-consistent; and secular science is all self-contradictory and therefore false.

There is another passage in which Barth tends to bring all knowledge under an original revelational axiom. He raises the question whether a knowledge of religion in general should serve as a norm for the interpretation of Christianity and revelation or *vice versa*. Modern Protestantism took the wrong course. "For where we think that revelation can be compared or equated with religion, we have not understood it as revelation . . . It can be understood only where *a priori* and with no possible alternative we accept its superiority over human religion, a superiority which does not allow us even to consider religion except in the light of revelation . . . Revelation is understood only where we expect from it, and from it alone, the first and last word about religion" (I 2, pp. 284, 295 ff.). Here Barth speaks explicitly about the problem of religion only. He seems to take it as a special problem. But if religion includes man and nature, anthropology and science, then revelation speaks the first and last word about everything. Does Barth hesitate so to extend his principle? In a note (p. 297) he warns against falling into "untheological thinking"—as if in some spheres such thinking is quite legitimate, though the reference is too vague and brief to be sure. More happily at the bot-

tom of the same page he returns to the axiomatic, systematic, and comprehensive procedure. "A theological evaluation of religion . . . will observe and understand and take man in all seriousness as the subject of religion. But it will not be man apart from God, in a human *per se*. It will be man for whom (whether he knows it or not) Jesus Christ was born, died, and rose again." Now, this may not be quite so explicit as one might desire; nor should Barth be forced to press his phrases beyond the limits he himself has set. But if man is one of God's creations, with a predetermined role in the Divine Comedy, then a non-theological theory of man is a false theory, and no twofold truth can save it.

To this point the present chapter has attempted to evaluate Barth's views on prolegomena and apologetics. His main contention, or what has been taken as his main contention, has been endorsed; namely, that apologetics must be derived from revelation. At the same time what seemed to be a lack of consistency or resoluteness led to certain proposals for improving and extending his apologetic method. The proposals submitted stressed apagogic apologetics, the unity of truth, and axiomatization as the most consistent denial of a common platform with unbelief. Unfortunately Barth seriously damages his valuable theses by an ambiguity in the term "common ground" and by the resultant over-extension in application. The term "common axiom" is clear enough. It indicates the presence, or, in this discussion, the absence of a given proposition in two sets of axioms, such as those of Euclidean and Riemannian geometries. But when we pass from geometry to theology, there arises still another confusion not yet mentioned. In theology, and more particularly in church proclamation, we are dealing, not only with systems of thought, but with people too. Hence someone may wish to say, not only that there is no axiom common to unbelief and theology, but also that there is no "ground" common to the unbeliever and the believer. Now, these two commonalities are distinct. Perhaps both are equally to be denied; perhaps not. But in any case, to confuse the two and pass unawares from the one to the other is improper procedure.

God's Image in Man

But Barth seems to have fallen into this confusion. Earlier Reformed theology, for example the first chapter of Calvin's *Institutes*,

may not have been so clear-sighted as Barth and may not have hit upon the clarity of expression in the methodological denial of a common axiom. But Reformed theology, while denying a common epistemological ground, has always asserted a common psychological or ontological ground. Believer and unbeliever alike, though their philosophic axioms and theorems are totally incompatible, bear in their persons the image of God from creation. This image consists of or at least includes their ordinary rational ability as human beings and as an exercise of this rationality certain minimal theological and moral principles. These beliefs, dimly and inconsistently held, often submerged and repressed, can be thought of as a point of contact for the Gospel. Apart from the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, these beliefs could never develop into a belief in the Gospel nor even into a knowledge of the Gospel. But in the series of psychological experiences, with all the many and great differences from individual to individual, these elementary beliefs can be used by the Holy Spirit to produce an acceptance of the message preached. Thus there is no inconsistency in denying a common axiom while asserting a common psychological or ontological "ground" or "point of contact." But Barth denies both.

In an important section on *The Word of God and Faith* Barth discusses the image of God in man. He quotes the phrases *finitum non capax infiniti* and *peccator non capax verbi divini*. Both of these phrases are basically acceptable to Barth: the finite cannot grasp the infinite and a sinner cannot receive the Word of God. Yet since men do in fact receive the Word of God in faith, Barth insists that the phrases must not be used so as to deny the facts. Men in themselves, both by reason of finitude and by reason of sin, have no capacity for receiving the Word. But faith overtakes this incapacity. Faith is not in any sense a capacity belonging to man; but in faith God gives or lends man a "qualification" for apprehending the Word of God. "Apprehension of the Word of God could not take place, were there not in and along with this event something in common between God who speaks and man who hears . . . a point of contact . . . between God and man" (I 1, p. 273). An excursus continues: "This point of contact is what theological anthropology . . . calls the 'image of God' in man. But in this respect and in this context we cannot possibly . . . mean by that the humanity and personality remaining over to sinful man from the creation: for the humanity and personality of sinful

man simply cannot signify conformity with God, a point of contact with the Word of God. In this sense, as a possibility for God proper to man *qua* creature, the 'image of God' is not only, as we say, with the exception of some remnants ruined, but annihilated. What is preserved of the image of God even in sinful man is *recta natura*, to which as such a *rectitudo* cannot be ascribed, even *potentialiter*. Man's capacity for God, however it may be with his humanity and personality, has really been lost. We cannot therefore see that at this point there comes into view a common basis of discussion for philosophical and theological anthropology, the opportunity for a common exhibition at least of the possibility of raising the question about God."

This passage and the discussion it provokes are beset with difficulties. At least three separate ideas seem to be merged, combined, or confounded. First there is the idea of a "common basis of discussion for philosophical and theological anthropology." This is the proposition, the platform, or the axiom already discussed. Second, the passage envisages a particular man, an individual mind, who is or is not capable of "apprehending" the Word of God. This subjective capacity or incapacity has to do with man's ordinary rational ability and his dim and inconsistent belief in a few simple theological and moral principles. Then, third, Barth adds in this passage an idea not previously mentioned, the idea of *rectitudo*, conformity with God, or, we might say personal righteousness. Since Barth does not clearly distinguish these three, but refers to them all as the point of contact and the image of God, it follows that when he denies a point of contact in natural man, he denies all three to the unbeliever.

In order to simplify these complexities, let us try immediately to dismiss the idea of *rectitudo* from the discussion. We have no intention of assigning to the unbeliever any "conformity with God" or any "qualification" that God lends man in faith. With Barth we too maintain and insist upon the total depravity of sinful man. His righteousnesses are as filthy rags; he has no merit before God; he is incapable of any spiritual good and wholly inclined to all evil. If the phrase "image of God" means *rectitudo*, then indeed sin has not only defaced but annihilated it. However, in Reformed theology this has not been the meaning of that phrase. Now, if it were merely a matter of words, one could say that Barth has only changed the phraseology while retaining the Reformed position intact. But by failing to draw

the distinction between an objective platform of axioms and a subjective acceptance of this or that proposition, and then by placing this combination within the results of faith, his denial of the image of God, a point of contact, a common ground, sweeps away the first two along with the third and is thus no longer merely a matter of words but an alteration in doctrine. In denying a point of contact in the unbeliever, Barth not only denies him *rectitudo*; he also denies him a capacity to apprehend, understand, or believe even one divine truth. If now Barth will accept our assurance that we too deny *rectitudo* to the unbeliever, we can proceed to discuss the image of God as understood in the original Reformed sense of "the humanity and personality remaining to sinful man from the creation," and determine whether or not this image is an ontological common ground and a point of contact.

In so defining the image of God we reveal another instance of solid agreement with Barth: not that he agrees with this definition, but that this definition rules out a common systematic axiom. In Reformed theology the defaced but not annihilated image of God in sinful man was never conceived as being an axiom common to two systems of thought. The image is a psychological, mental, ontological reality. It is an existing part of human nature. Let us assure Barth that from this element an unregenerate man cannot somehow manufacture faith. The present criticism proceeds always along the line that Barth's most cherished theses can be maintained, and maintained more thoroughly than he himself maintains them. Here he is worried by a non-existent danger. Without falling into modernism or into Romanism one may hold that there is a sense in which man has a capacity for faith not shared by a tree or a stone. When God gives the gift of faith, he is not miraculously raising up sons to Abraham out of the stones on the roadway. Faith is a mental activity and by definition presupposes a rational subject. Reason therefore can be considered to be an element common to believer and unbeliever; and if "apprehension" of the Word of God is the understanding of a divine message, then the image of God preserved from creation and the fall is a prerequisite thereto.

Man's logical capacity is not the only constituent of God's image. In addition there are a few simple theological and moral beliefs. In the section last quoted (I 1, p. 272) Barth wishes to do justice to these facts; '*peccator non capax*' must bow to actual faith. But there are

other facts also. Unless everybody is to be included as a believer in the Church, we must admit the existence of unbelievers who actually even if inconsistently believe a few divine truths. Two systems of thought as such cannot contain common knowledge. Based as they are on separate sets of axioms, they can have no proposition in common; and if one system is true, the other must be false. However, living people are not so thoroughly consistent as ideal systems. People are inconsistent; they believe contradictories without noticing the fact. Hence it is psychologically possible for an unbeliever and a believer to agree on a given proposition. And this point of agreement may be used as a point of contact for the Gospel. What is thus theoretically possible, the majority of exegetes have supposed to be declared actual in the first chapter of Romans. Does not Paul assert that the heathen have a knowledge of God? This knowledge may not be extensive, but its importance depends on its being the basis of heathen responsibility.

Now, because of such beliefs held inconsistently, the Gospel has a point of contact, and apagogic argument can be extended. Not only may the apologete show the self-contradiction inherent in secular axioms, as we said above; he may now stress the inconsistency of accepting both a secular axiom and a divine truth; and he may draw out the inferences of the divine truth and show its consistency with the additional truths of revelation. But apparently Barth will have none of this.

It is interesting to examine how Barth attempts to avoid the usual interpretation of the first chapter of Romans. "The witness which the apostle declares to the heathen in and with the preaching of Christ, which he therefore awakens in them and makes valid against them, is here emphasized to be their knowledge of God the Creator" (I 2, p. 306). This introduction clearly says that not until Paul had preached to the heathen, was this knowledge in their minds. It was Paul who awakened it and who thus made them responsible for sin. Their refusal to accept this knowledge, their suppression of it in unrighteousness, must therefore have occurred after and not before the ministry of the Apostle. The idolatry and immorality described in the chapter can therefore be only that of the first century of our era, and only that of the people to whom Paul himself preached. No doubt the heathen had always so lived, but Barth implies that the sin intended in the chapter is only sin A.D., and no reference to sin B.C.

is intended. This is an unusual exegesis; but first let us follow Barth's exposition further. "We must bear in mind that the very words which are so often regarded as an opening or a summons to every possible kind of natural theology are in reality a constituent part of the apostolic kerygma . . . To bring out the real meaning of the revelation of the righteousness of God in Christ, Paul reminds us that the same revelation is a revelation of the wrath of God, i.e., that as we are told of the grace which has come to us, we have to perceive and believe our own abandonment to judgment. . . . It is presupposing the event which took place between God and man in Christ that he says that the knowledge which the Gentiles have of God from the works of creation is the instrument to make them inexcusable and therefore to bring them like the Jews under the judgment and therefore under the grace of God. . . . Because Paul has to preach this Christ, he can claim the heathen on the ground that they too belong to God and know about God, that God is actually revealed to them, that he has made himself known to them in the works of creation as God—his eternal power and divinity, which are none other than that of Jesus Christ . . . We cannot isolate what Paul says about the heathen in Rom. 1:19-20 from the context of the apostle's preaching, from the incarnation of the Word. We cannot understand it as an abstract statement about the heathen as such, or about a revelation which the heathen possess as such."

The exegesis in this excursus, repeated and enlarged upon in other passages, while containing some good ideas, will hardly approve itself in its entirety. The main thought is *prima facie* improbable. Paul's words rather clearly suggest a statement about the heathen as such and a revelation which they possess. Indeed Barth himself admits that if Romans 1:18-21, and one would like to add Romans 1:18-32, were read apart from the context, "we should hardly have any other choice than to acknowledge that it says that man in the cosmos in himself and as such is an independent witness of the truth of God" (II 1, p. 119). Many exegetes will fail to see how the context alters this interpretation.¹

But what is disastrous is that even if we accept Barth's exegesis, it does not prove the point he is trying to make. He wishes to show that there is no common ground, no common knowledge, between believers and unbelievers. Now, the Gentiles in the first chapter of Romans were unbelievers. Even if they had heard Paul preach, they

¹ Cf. A. p. 87 where Barth himself seems to adopt the usual view.

were still unbelievers, idolaters, and gross sinners. Yet it is of such people that Paul says, "Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them." Therefore even on Barth's exegesis the Pauline unbeliever has a belief in common with the man of faith.

Nor can the remainder of Barth's exegesis be accepted in its entirety. "Paul says nothing at all about the heathen maintaining a remnant of the 'natural' knowledge of God in spite of this defection. On the contrary, he says unreservedly that the wrath of God has been revealed against this defection. . . . Just as revelation had always contradicted heathen religion in the sphere of Israel and on the soil of Palestine, so now, when Jesus Christ has died for all, it contradicts it 'publicly,' in its own heathen area, in an apostolic letter which remarkably enough is addressed to Christians in Rome. There is no such thing now as an undisputed heathendom, a heathendom which is relatively possible, which can be excused" (I 2, p. 307). But was there ever a heathendom that could be excused? Were the Sodomites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites guiltless before God? Or, if Barth takes care of these three nations by his reference to the soil of Palestine, were the Assyrians, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians guiltless? One is reminded of Pascal's reply to the Jesuits that on such a theory it would be better not to preach the Gospel to them. They are safe so long as they remain ignorant, but knowledge brings responsibility and condemnation. Now, Paul indeed bases responsibility on knowledge, but he asserts that the heathen had knowledge, some knowledge at any rate; they tried to suppress it, but could not quite succeed. And even if it were Paul who "awakened" this knowledge in them, the implication would be that some remnant or potential knowledge had been lying dormant in their minds to be awakened. And, finally, to repeat, it is indubitable that the heathen and the believer have this knowledge in common.

Although indubitable, Barth doubts and denies it. In addition to the passages so far examined, others, perhaps not independently important, corroborate Barth's rejection of a common ground. Since the idea of the image of God is uniformly conjoined with that of a common ground, the latter vanishes with the removal of the former. Because these passages are only of secondary or corroborative importance in this connection, they will be only briefly considered.

Speaking of the "hiddenness" or incomprehensibility of God Barth

writes, "It is the case that we resemble what we can apprehend. Thus we certainly resemble the world and everything in it. . . . And for this reason we can form views and concepts of the world and what is in it. But we do not resemble God. The fact that we are created in the likeness of God means that God has determined us to bear witness to his existence in our existence. But it does not mean that we possess and discover an attribute within ourselves on the basis of which we are on a level with God Because therefore we do not find in ourselves anything which resembles God we cannot apprehend him by ourselves" (II 1, p. 188). Now, the remark about man and God being on the same level is quite beside the point. A given resemblance between two objects does not imply that the objects are on the same level. The remark seems to spring from a peculiar epistemological theme, for Barth immediately continues, "We are masters of what we can apprehend. Viewing and conceiving certainly mean encompassing, and we are superior to, and spiritually masters of, what we can encompass. In this sense we are masters of the world and everything in it . . ." And he continues in an Hegelian strain. But it is largely a play on words. There is no compulsion to accept this doubtful epistemology; and this is not the place to discuss the incomprehensibility of God. But aside from these points, while it may be that man does not resemble God, if indeed the image of God in man is restricted to his God-given purpose to witness to God's existence; yet since the purpose is essential to human nature, the unbeliever and the believer have this element in common. Barth explicitly avoids calling this common element an "attribute," but the term used is immaterial. The point of interest is a common ground between believer and unbeliever. In spite of his aim Barth has not succeeded in erasing a common ground; at most his argument denies that the image consists of rational personality and asserts that it consists in being a witness.

The next of these secondary passages is the following. "God cannot be classified or included in the same category with anything that he is not. There exists no synthesis in which the same attribute, whether being, spirit, life, or love, can be predicated in the same sense both of God and of something else . . . *Deus non est in genere*, as we have seen already" (II 1, p. 310).

Here again there are important epistemological assumptions that cannot now be discussed. The denial of a predicate common to God and man implies that God is unknowable because totally other; and

the theory of predication seems to be that of Platonic realism in which "higher" ideas, sharing more completely in the Idea of the Good, enjoy a higher dignity and divinity. If Barth should allow for cross-classifications, in which there is no lower and higher, in which there is no ontological hierarchy, the conclusions would be different. But as it is, there can be no image of God in man, and there can be no common quality among men based on such an image.

The third and last of these corroborating passages in which Barth rules out a common ground by denying the image of God in man is very explicit and very extreme: "God cannot be compared to anyone or anything. He is only like himself" (II 1, p. 376).

Excursus. Barth does not exactly intend to deny an image of God in man. In a later passage Barth admits that there is a similarity between God and man. He admits that in some way God is like his creature. God is a prototype to which man corresponds; man is a heterogeneous imitation of God and has his pattern in the nature of God himself (III, 1, 183-184). Barth then strangely continues, "'He created them male and female' . . . As in this sense man is the first and only one to be created in genuine confrontation with God . . . it is he first and alone who is created 'in the image' and 'after the likeness' of God." Not to stress the unusual identification of the image as the sexual differentiation of male and female, one wonders why Barth in the next lines says, "God-likeness . . . is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man's peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything man is or does . . . He is the image of God in the fact that he is man" (III 1, p. 184).

The traditional identification of the image as the rational, including the moral, aptitudes of man is a better one than that of sex. But Barth insists that "the biblical witness makes no reference at all to the peculiar intellectual and moral talents and possibilities of man, to his reason and its determination and exercise. It is not in something which distinguishes him from the beasts, but in that which formally he has in common with them, viz., that God has created him male and female, that he is this being . . . in natural fellowship with God" (*ibid.*, p. 185). In excluding rational and moral talents from the biblical witness, Barth does not mention God's conversing with Adam (Gen. 1:28-29), nor God's command in the Covenant of Works (Gen. 2:15-17), nor Adam's naming the animals; and he dismisses Adam's rule over the animals by referring it to the plurality of male and female. "Men are simply male and female. Whatever else they may be, it is only in this differentiation and relationship" (*ibid.*, p. 186).

To suppose that the sexual distinction is the image of God is a highly imaginative interpretation. It also falls afoul of the New Testament teaching that there is no marriage relationship in heaven—unless Barth would be willing to say that in heaven God is no longer man's prototype and man

no longer has his ground and possibility in God. Barth's view in this passage is consistent with his denial of innate knowledge common to believer and unbeliever; but it conflicts with his other assertions that there is no similarity between God and man.

Now, in conclusion, first, the exposition has shown that Barth denies a common ground between believer and unbeliever and therefore also a point of contact between the unbeliever and the Gospel. The only point of contact that he allows is one which occurs at or after the moment of conversion. Because of this he repudiates apagogic argument, excludes all independent apologetics without specifying any definite place for a dependent apologetics, and has virtually nothing to say to the outside world, if there is one.

In the second place, the analyses and criticism aimed to show that Barth's view stems from fear of what seems to be an imaginary danger, namely, that a psychological point of contact and a common axiom or platform are the same thing and lead to the dissolution of Christianity in modernistic humanism.

Then, in the third place, the critic suggested that what Barth had joined together, Reformed theologians should put asunder. In fact the distinction between an objective and a subjective point of contact should not have been difficult for Barth. In another context, concerning the incarnation of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the subsidiary distinction between the truth of the Holy Scripture and how this truth confirms itself to us, Barth explicitly emphasizes the difference between what is objective and what is subjective (I 2, pp. 538-539). Had the same idea occurred to him with respect to the point of contact, the Reformed doctrine of the image of God would not have been abolished by redefinition, apologetics would not have been compromised, and Barth could have directly confronted the secular world that so desperately needs a direct confrontation.

V

LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE

The preceding chapters have called attention to two strands of thought interwoven in Barth's writings. On the one hand there are clear and strong assertions of rationality and logic; but sometimes there are hesitations that lead the reader to suspect a sort of irrationalism. The present evaluation stresses the first and minimizes the second. To show first of all Barth's high regard for reason and clear thinking, further passages dealing mainly with language will be listed; but also in the second place we shall see his unwillingness to follow through.

Barth's Rationality

As a sort of title to head the list Barth's acceptance of the Hegelian dictum that "All is rational" may well be repeated from Chapter III. Naturally no one expects Barth to be an Hegelian, but then neither would anyone expect this Hegelian phrase to be acknowledged by a thoroughly faithful disciple of Kierkegaard. Its occurrence therefore indicates a dissatisfaction with the Danish theologian's irrationalism.¹

Although Barth had early been influenced by Kierkegaard, he has changed and now is not so fond of the idea of paradox. Speaking of

¹ Hamer, *Karl Barth—L'Occasionalisme Théologique de K. B.* pp. 173-175, argues that Barth has rejected S.K. *in toto*.

I Corinthians 13:12 where Paul tells us that we see through a mirror in an enigma, Barth writes, "It is to the concept of the paradox that we must here point. A paradox is such a communication as is . . . contrary to what the phenomenon as such appears to express. Just because the Word of God alone fulfills the concept of paradox with complete strictness, whereas in all other thinkable "paradoxes" the opposition between communication and form is such that it can be dissolved from some superior point of vantage, it is to be recommended that in theology more sparing use should henceforth be made of this concept now that it has done its part, not without causing all manner of confusions" (I 1, p. 189).

This paragraph is not completely satisfactory. To the credit of Barth's rationality the passage disapproves of the prior indiscriminate use of the concept of paradox. But there are two entries on the other side of the ledger: first, that a wrong use has accomplished some good and that in spite of all manner of confusion such a wrong use was justified; and second, that even now a "sparing" use of paradox is legitimate and perhaps necessary. The reason why this second point is placed on the debit side lies in the definition of paradox. Granted that we see through a mirror in an enigma, i.e., that our knowledge is partial, it does not follow that Paul was describing the Kierkegaardian paradox. Note that Barth separates the paradox of the Word of God from all other thinkable paradoxes. The latter can be dissolved, explained, or harmonized from some superior point of vantage. The former therefore cannot; it is an ultimate irrationalism. But Paul, after referring to the mirror and enigma, added, "but then I shall know even as also I am known."

A later paragraph provides a more satisfactory view in that Barth acknowledges the superior vantage point which Paul has appealed to; and the reader is left to judge whether in the interim Barth had still further removed himself from Kierkegaard's position. God's wisdom, says Barth, is such that he "knows why and wherefore he wills what he wills." Man may be puzzled when he asks, Why? But man's ignorance does not mean that God has no answer to this Why? Strange as historical developments often appear, God "is not overcome by a whim or a chance inspiration. He is not capricious. But in this as in every other respect he is the God of Order" (II 1, pp. 424-425).

These lines exclude any ultimate paradox. God himself is rational; there is no chance or accident in the world. Everything is orderly and logical.

What follows is even stronger. "The unity of the grace and holiness and the mercy and righteousness of God has nothing to do with a 'paradox' as has often been alleged . . . For if God is for us an abyss of chance and caprice, if as far as possible we regard the irrational as the essentially divine, we neither have nor can have any real confidence in relation to God. For confidence is based on the appreciation of reason, meaning, and order." Then in fine print on the following page, after a complaint that Protestant orthodoxy did not sufficiently emphasize the wisdom of God, Barth remarks, "this God who vindicates the validity of his saving counsel in opposition to the world is himself as such the source of all true logical consistency." Then in the next short excursus, "The truth that God is wise must, like his holiness and righteousness, mean primarily that he is steadfast and self-consistent. It is in this that he shows his intelligence . . . God apprehends himself and is therefore eternal reason . . . When God is apprehended as the One who under all circumstances is intelligence and reason in this way, purposing and deciding and speaking and acting on this basis, the knowledge of God means that we can have confidence in him, that we can be free, that all the uncertainty and darkness of the capricious and irrational is ended" (II 1, p. 427) .

In these pages reason, meaning, order, logical consistency, and intelligence have been contrasted with paradox, caprice, the irrational, uncertainty and darkness; and the former win approval. If this be true in the case of God and his purposes for the world, can it be less true for man? Must not he also strain after, if he cannot perfectly achieve, rationality? Paul Tillich is not to be commended for his vague expressions so empty of meaning (I 1, pp. 209-210) . A theologian should be clear headed; he should never confuse "the World-Ground or the World-Soul, the Supreme Good or Supreme Value, the Thing-in-Itself or the Absolute, Destiny or Being or Idea, or even the First Cause" with God. These concepts are distinct and should be distinguished. "The Gospel of the Church of God is therefore of necessity a defined, circumscribed, and limited message. It does not contain and say anything and everything. Its content is not the 'apeiron,' the boundless and groundless that human presumption would like to make God out to be. It does not destroy perception, but integrates it. It does not oppose a definite and concrete view, but establishes it. It does not teach thought to lose itself in an unthinkable one and all, but forms it to very definite concepts—affirming this and denying that, including this and excluding that" (II 1, pp. 6, 20; cf. *ibid.*,

38-39). Granted, this is not the tone found in Barth's earlier writing (e.g., W. G. p. 73), but it speaks for itself here. Pious vagaries are compared with Anaximander's indistinct boundless; definite concepts (and may we add precise creedal formulas also?) including this and excluding that are desiderata. "We may say that dogmatics especially, which is always concerned to distinguish and discriminate (and necessarily so for the purity and fulness of Church doctrine) has its authorization and justification at this point in the concept of God. If we do not like dogmatics because of its inevitable refinements and distinctions, we must consider whether we are not tilting against God himself" (II 1, p. 316). Could the Scottish authors of the Westminster Confession have defended their "scholasticism" any more vigorously?

These quotations supporting intellectualism, rationality, and definite concepts have been fairly general in nature. Now to be examined is a particular application, one that leads us deeper into Barth's rationality, and finally into his hesitations—an application of these general sentiments to language.

For Barth experience of the Word of God, i.e., determination of the whole self-determining man by the Word of God, is comprehended under the concept of acknowledgment. To explain this concept Barth itemizes nine of its aspects. "1. In the first place, the word acknowledgment involves the concept of knowledge. This must be so because the Word of God is primarily and predominantly language, communication from person to person, from mind to mind, spirit, a rational event, the Word of truth, because it is directed to man's *ratio*, by which, of course, we are not to understand the intellect alone, but the intellect at least also and not last of all" (I 1, p. 234).

Just what *ratio* includes beside intellect is not made clear; but it is clear that intellect is "not last of all." The Word of God, to be received, must come to a man in the form of language because the Word is a communication of truth from mind to mind. This emphasis is most wholesome in an age of anti-intellectualism. When religious writers deprecate intellectualism, inveigh against lengthy creeds, and reduce the Christian message to the one proposition that the Word became *flesh*, the reply is needed that what became flesh was the *Word*, the Logos, the Ratio or Verbum. Such a Logos cannot be restricted to one proposition. Its expression requires an extended message in a large Book. For Barth's emphasis on language, clear-thinking theologians must be grateful. "The knowledge of God is true knowl-

edge and not vague surmise and sentiment. As knowledge it has to be expressed in words . . . We not merely may but must ask in human words and concepts what God is and is not, and in what way he is what he is . . . If we refuse to ask these questions, we must consider whether we are not secretly of the opinion that it is preferable to renounce the attempt to know God, or to abandon ourselves in this matter to our own arbitrary opinion or to chance. We must consider how we can accept responsibility for either the one or the other in view of the fact of divine revelation, which takes from us the pretext of our incapacity, and in face of which we have therefore no excuse if . . . we should wish to prefer laziness to industry or confusion to order" (II 1, p. 336).

Pietism, ignorance, and non-creedal religion must smart under the lash of these words; but because pious confusion is often excusable owing to the lack of mental ability, Barth's lash stings far more those intellectually able theologians who take refuge in paradox and seem happy with rational absurdity. For example, Reinhold Niebuhr writes: "There is no escape from the rational absurdity of the real self, because it is at once in time and beyond time. It is spatial and yet non-spatial. . . . Yet this double fact, which outrages the sense of rational coherence, is a fact of daily experience" (*The Self and the Dramas of History*, p. 24). The reader must ask, if there is rational absurdity in such an important factor of experience as the self, for that matter if there is rational absurdity anywhere, is not all theology and thought absurd? If we can contradict ourselves at one point, cannot we do so at any and all points?

Now, since Barth is willing in one place to repeat that the All is rational, might not we also quote from Hegel? "Truth finds the medium of its existence in notions or conceptions alone . . . [Otherwise] philosophy is thus expected . . . not so much to get chaotic conscious life brought back to the orderly ways of thought . . . as to restore the *feeling* of existence . . . The force of mind [however] is only as great as its expression. Moreover . . . this contempt for all measurable precision and definiteness simply confirms in its own case the fortuitous character of its content and . . . endows God with its own caprice."¹

In Barth's view human finitude and even human sin provide no pretext for avoiding clear theological thinking and speaking. God has

¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, Preface I 2.

given us a revelation, a communication of truth, and therefore we can and must speak. God has done something immeasurably more important than giving us feelings and emotions. God has spoken to us, and therefore we must speak. God's speaking and our speaking are clearly conjoined on several of Barth's pages. "Proclamation is human language in and through which God himself speaks, like a king through the mouth of a herald, which moreover is meant to be heard and apprehended as language in and through which God himself speaks" (I 1, p. 57). "Church proclamation is language. Holy Scripture is also language. But revelation itself and as such is language too . . . 'God's Word' means God speaks. 'Speaks' is not a symbol (as Paul Tillich, *Rel. Verwirkl.* 1930, p. 48, thinks) . . . We might very well be of the private opinion that it would be better and nicer if God had not spoken and did not speak with such deliberate 'intellectualism' and that it would be more appropriate to God if 'God's Word' meant all sorts of different things, apart from the meaning 'God speaks.' But is this private opinion of ours so important, resting, as it does, upon some sort of philosophy? . . . 'God's Word' means 'God speaks,' and all further statements about it must be regarded as exegesis, not as limitation or negation of this proposition" (I 1, p. 150).

He goes on here to condemn the famous translation of John 1:1 made by Goethe's *Faust*. Then a page later, "The form in which reason communicates with reason, person with person, is language, so too when it is God's language. Of course it is divine reason that communicates with human reason, the divine person with the human person. . . . The Word of God—we should not evade the concept so much tabued today—is a rational and not an irrational event. The reminder about supposedly 'deeper' anthropological strata of being beyond the rational rests upon a philosophical construction and a philosophical value-judgment, about which philosophers must come to an agreement among themselves. We have nothing to say to it save that the meeting of God and man . . . takes place primarily, pre-eminently, and characteristically in this sphere, the sphere of *ratio*, however deep or the reverse of deep this may lie according to philosophical judgment" (I 1, pp. 152-153).

To be sure, this is not all that Barth says. Between these two quotations just made there stands a paragraph of qualification. Evidently Barth thought it necessary. But the qualification is not nearly so clear as the quoted paragraphs are, nor does it seem to conflict with their

prima facie meaning. Barth will soon hesitate to carry through with this emphasis on rational communication, but any inconsistency there may be depends on the fact that he here makes this emphasis. Indeed he makes it many times.

In opposition to various shades of mysticism Barth is willing to say that revelation conveys information. "For by bringing them together it [revelation] informs man about God and about himself . . . It does that by telling him that God is free for us, that God has created and sustains him, that he forgives sin, that he saves him from death . . . The cosmos will lose the power to prepare for him either illusions or disillusionments. He knows all about it. Not because he has supplied himself with information about it by intuitive or analytico-synthetic means, but because he has been informed about it . . . It is God's revelation that gives him this information" (I 2, pp. 29-30).

All this is in sharpest contrast with those contemporary theologians who deny that revelation is a "communication of truth," who deny that God can give information, who exclude reason and intelligence from religion. Let them suffer under the lash of Barth and Hegel. In escaping *die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, they do not even rise to the level of *Träume eines Geistersehers*. Even sorcery values information. And Christianity rightly so-called is a rational and intelligible religion. Whatever of zeal, devotion, volition, or even emotion it may have, it is fundamentally intellectual. It brings information. Otherwise it would not meet human need, human need of salvation from sin. Irrationalism is a travesty on human nature, on communion between God and man, and on God himself.

One can easily guess how this emphasis on rational speech is applied concretely. In opposition to Romish sacramentarianism Barth insists on the necessity of preaching. He pointedly objects that a priest may pass his whole career without preaching even once, though he must celebrate the mass every day (I 1, pp. 71-79). Indeed, so far as the need for preaching is concerned, quoting references is superfluous, for there are so many. But on the necessity of language and the intelligibility of Scripture another reference will add weight to the theme of rationality.

"Consciously or unconsciously every hearer is necessarily faced with the question whether and how he can be a real hearer and doer of the Word. And true preaching will direct him rather 'rigidly' to something written, or to his baptism or to the Lord's Supper, instead of

pointing him in the slightest to his own or the preacher's or other people's experience . . . If we claim for a moment that experiences are valid and can be passed on, we find that they are marshy ground upon which neither the preacher nor the hearer can stand or walk. Therefore they are not the object of Christian proclamation" (I 2, p. 249). The reference to baptism and the Lord's Supper here does not detract from the necessity and intelligibility of the written word because Barth has already made the word preached an indispensable adjunct of the sacrament. The emphasis remains on what is written or spoken.

Again, "The fact that the primary sign of revelation, the existence of the prophets and apostles, is for the Church book and letter, does not rob it of its force as witness. If the book rises and the letter speaks, if the book is read and the letter understood, then with them the prophets and apostles and he of whom they testify rise up and meet the Church in a living way. It is not the book and letter, but the voice of the men apprehended through the book and letter, and in the voice of these men the voice of him who called them to speak, which is authority in the Church. Why should it be a dead authority because it stands in the book and letter—as though for that reason it could not speak . . . It is its written nature that is also its protection against the chance and self-will to which it would be exposed without it. Its written nature . . . is still unalterably there over against all misunderstandings and misinterpretations of it, is still unalterably the same, can always speak for itself, can always be examined and questioned as it is, to control and correct every interpretation" (I 2, pp. 581-582). "The presentation of the Scriptural word as something intrinsically intelligible is the problem of scriptural interpretation as presentation. Its presupposition and its most important instrument is, of course, literary-historical investigation. I must try to hear the words of the prophets and apostles in exactly the same freedom in which I attempt to hear the words of others who speak to me or have written for me as in the main intelligible words" (I 2, p. 723). Now this last quotation suggests that either the Scripture or other books may contain some unintelligible words. Barth may even regard this as a fact and not merely an *a priori* possibility. But the emphasis is on an intelligible message written in grammatical language. He speaks of Scripture as "something intrinsically intelligible." Intelligibility is the ground on which he opposes, as was indicated earlier, the musical or other symbolism of Paul Tillich, Julius Smend, Otto Dibelius, and H. Bär (I 1, p. 70).

For these reasons Barth opposes mysticism. "The concept of faith which we find in the Bible and the Early Church must not be re-interpreted in the direction of mysticism. In faith it is not at all the case that on an irrational and super-empirical interior level of human consciousness man arrives at a unity with God in the form of the suspension of the subject-object relationship of the limitation in which God is revealed to us" (II 1, p. 57). Not only does the reference to subjects and objects exclude Plotinic trances and pantheistic absorption into the divine being, the irrational and super-empirical interiority includes the pietistic tendency toward subjectivity in hymns (I 2, p. 255) and other apparently devout withdrawals from the outer world (I 2, pp. 319-320).

A revelation that satisfies the requirements of these quotations must be verbal and propositional. An unintelligible revelation, one that was not a communication of truth, one that did not provide information, one that was without definite commands which the hearer is supposed to do (I 2, p. 207), would be no revelation at all. And even if the phrase 'propositional revelation' smacks too much of academic logic to please Barth, nonetheless he repudiates "an inexpressible and speechless Itness" (I 1, p. 474).

Hesitation

This hammering away on the one note of rationality is important because of its contrast with Barth's hesitations. Most unfortunately he does not follow through with the theme of words, propositions, language, subjects and predicates, and intelligibility. Some of the later passages to be examined are so far removed from the preceding that it will become necessary to return to the quotations above and check them for accuracy. But as a transition to his limitations on language, a further reference to mysticism will serve, for although Barth opposes mysticism, he has something very similar to it in his own system.

"The human impossibility of the Church's proclamation consists simply in the impossibility of the attempt to speak of God. . . . This attempt and intention are as such impossible. God does not belong to the world. Therefore he does not belong to the series of objects for which we have categories and words . . . Of God it is impossible to speak, because he is neither a natural nor a spiritual object. If we speak of him, we are no longer speaking of him. . . . This is the iron law under which all Church proclamation without exception stands

...” Then comes an excursus. “This iron law itself cannot be understood without the prior assumption that the proclamation of the Church is the Word of God. It is not understandable as something in itself, nor as a general truth. The mystic and agnostic philosophers apparently use the same phrases . . . that it is not possible for us to speak of him. But by God they do not mean the Creator of heaven and earth . . . What they mean is the unutterableness of a depth of the mystery of the world and the human soul, the unutterableness of a depth in which man can probe far enough to see for himself that it is unutterable . . . That man really cannot really speak of God is only realized when it is known that he really can really speak of God, because God himself with his Word and Spirit steps forth . . . in order to make possible for man that which is not possible for him of himself. . . . It then becomes plain to him that he had not meant God at all when previously as a self-assured mystic or skeptic he has affirmed and denied in the very same breath the unutterableness of God” (I 2, pp. 750-751).

The import of this passage is not clear. There are three possibilities. First, the end of the passage may suggest that Barth is alluding to his rejection of natural theology, but that he has said more than he intended. On this interpretation he would merely mean that God is not an object on the level with other natural or spiritual objects, and that the concepts applicable to God cannot be abstracted from sensory experience but are furnished to man by God’s Word and Spirit in a special revelation. Unfortunately the sense of the paragraph seems to go considerably beyond this easy interpretation.

Somewhat similarly in the second place one may find the chief import of the passage in Barth’s rejection of mysticism and skepticism. These thinkers speak of the unutterableness of God, but in reality they are not talking about God the Creator of the world, but only about the world itself. Undoubtedly Barth means at least this.

But in the third place there is a hint, let us not say more than a hint, of something else. The beginning of the quotation says bluntly that Church proclamation about God is impossible, and the reason given is that the mind of man does not have categories and words that apply to God. Man lacks these words and categories, so it seems, because language is earth-bound. Our concepts apply only to created objects. Therefore it is impossible to attempt to talk about God.

If this passage were all that Barth had said about language, we could

not press it. But in conjunction with what follows, it may be taken as a warning that Barth is hesitating and that he may circumscribe and qualify the other excellent statements in favor of rational religion.

In one of his strongest, though not one of his most characteristic, depreciations of language Barth asserts that the Church's "language about God is the language of the *per se* faithless and anti-faith reason of man" (I 1, p. 30). Later on he writes, "Theology and the Church, and before them the Bible itself, speak in fact no other language than that of this world, shaped in form and content by the creaturely nature of this world, but also conditioned by the limitations of humanity: the language in which man as he is at the moment, therefore sinful and perverted man, tries to come to terms with the world. . . . Bible, Church, and theology speak this language, undoubtedly on the supposition that there might be 'something in it,' namely, that in this language something might also be said of God's revelation, evidence be given, God's Word be proclaimed, dogma be formulated and explained. The only question is whether this ability should be regarded as an ability proper to the language and so to the world, i.e., to men, or as a risk expected of the language and so of the world or man, so to speak, from without, so as to be not really the ability of the language, the world, man, but the ability of revelation, if we are really speaking in the form of concepts and ideas which also exist otherwise and in themselves, in conformity with the created world and with the power of man in his analysis of this world—in one word really speaking about revelation, the Trinity, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, about things over which this language of men as such has absolutely no control. . . . But the mystery of revelation, still as alive as ever even in the formulated dogma, made a further demand, only now in accordance with the decision as to how it was to be regarded, for language. And only now was it discovered, not that language could grasp the revelation, but that the revelation, particularly the revelation now properly and authoritatively appreciated in the formulated dogma, could grasp the language, i.e., that always starting from revelation, sufficient elements were to be discovered in the familiar language spoken by all, to make speech about revelation possible, not exhaustively or suitably or exactly, but still to a certain extent comprehensibly and clearly . . . Men were quite certain about the Trinity; on the other hand they were uncertain about the language they had to speak about the Trinity . . . The case then was not that

men wished to explain the Trinity by the world, but on the contrary that they wished to explain the world by the Trinity in order to be able to speak of the Trinity in this world . . . The problem involved was that of theological language, which can be none other than the language of the world and which, whatever the cost, must always speak and believes that it can speak, contrary to the natural capacity of this language, as theological language, of God's revelation" (I 1, pp. 390-392).

This lengthy quotation and the section from which it is taken cannot be wholly commended nor wholly condemned. It contains two incompatible ideas, of which the more prominent conflicts with the earlier itemized approvals of reason and language. Here the thrust of the material is seen close to the end: theology must use language "whatever the cost," and this use is "contrary to the natural capacity of this language." Nearer the beginning of the quotation the use of language was designated as a "risk." Two reasons were offered; first, that language is shaped in form and content by the creaturely nature of this world, and second, that it is conditioned by the sinful and perverted nature of man so that theological language "is the language of the *per se* faithless and anti-faith reason of man." Such a strong condemnation of language throws doubt on every possibility of its use in theology. Indeed, if language is the product of sin, conditioned by man's perverted nature and unsuitable even when revelation grasps it, there arises the question whether God himself would or could use it. If God should use this perverted instrument, it is still difficult to see how he could communicate truth to man or give him any reliable information. God would contaminate his message with the result that if there should remain "something in it," no one could discover what it might be. If, on the other hand, revelation escapes this nemesis by not being a communication of truth, then Barth should never have written his previous material, but should have openly acknowledged uncontrolled irrationalism.

A further complication is the parallel status of the humanity of Christ, a point made by previous critics which should be kept in mind not only here but throughout Chapter VII also. The criticism is this: if God cannot speak the truth in human language because language is anti-faith, how can the personal Word become flesh without becoming sinful *ipso facto*? The spoken word and the incarnate Word must be treated alike; sinful reason and sinful flesh would have parallel effects.

Barth himself calls attention to this parallelism and tries to preserve it within his own framework. The following quotation is based on the assumption that identifying Scripture with the Word of God would be tantamount to a denial of Chalcedonian Christology.

“Again it is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of Holy Scripture and the Word of God, and therefore between the creaturely reality in itself and as such and the reality of God the Creator . . . This is not the case even in the person of Christ . . . In contrast to the humanity of Jesus Christ, there is no unity between God and the humanity of the prophets and apostles . . . As the Word of God in the sign of this prophetic-apostolic word of man, Holy Scripture is like the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. It is neither divine only nor human only. Nor is it a mixture of the two nor a *tertium quid* between them. But in its own way and degree it is very God and very man, i.e., a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation, and historically a very human literary document” (I 2, pp. 499-501).

Barth’s argument here does not quite meet the issue involved. In the first place his parallel cases are poorly chosen. A confusion of natures, Eutychianism, is a matter entirely different from the repetition by one person of words said by another. In the second place Barth overlooks the true parallel: if language is sinful because human, then Christ because human must have been sinful.

When Barth continues his argument, he says things that fit much better into orthodox Protestantism than into his own framework. The following quotation specifies proclamation rather than the Scripture, and so is more appropriate to Barth’s intentions; but what he says can be said of Scripture with greater force. “As Christ became true man and also remains true man to all eternity, so real proclamation becomes an event on the level of all other human events. It can be seen and heard on this level, and this being seen and heard, moreover, cannot be a mere appearance, but must happen in all essentiality . . . Where God is really served, there—without omission of the human element . . . in its entire humanity—the volition and execution of God are also in the center as the first and decisive element, indeed as befits God the Creator and Lord” (I 1, pp. 105-106). If then the volition and execution of God are decisive, why cannot God preserve Christ both from sin and from false statements?

However, Barth hesitates to follow through with the negative theme as much as he hesitates with the positive. He suggests that

language is capable of expressing revelation, not because of any ability inherent in the language, but only by reason of the ability of revelation to grasp language. "Always starting from revelation, sufficient elements were discovered in the familiar language spoken by all to make speech about revelation possible." What are these elements? Are they words, such as, forgiveness, sin, justification, Trinity? Are they declensional and conjugational forms and prepositional constructions? If so, and what else could they be, are these not inherent in the language as such? Using them to express revealed truth does not alter them or give them new abilities. No doubt revelation "grasps" them, just as Caesar grasped them in writing his Gallic Wars. That the information God conveys could not have been discovered by man alone is essential to the idea of revelation. No plea is made that language or science could be analyzed so as to discover the truth of the Trinity or the offer of forgiveness. But this is quite different from saying that language is inadequate to express these truths.

Unfortunately Barth is unclear even as to the extent that revelation or God can "grasp" language. The sentence in which he says that there are usable elements in language ends with the limitation that speech about revelation is possible, but not exhaustively, suitably, or exactly. By exhaustively does Barth mean merely that the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Nicene Creed does not explain the process of sanctification, or even explain everything about the Trinity? But this is not in dispute. An elementary textbook on chemistry used in high school does not express or explain all chemistry, and neither does an advanced textbook on Quantitative Analysis. Yet both textbooks are suitable and exact. Similarly the articles of the Westminster Confession may be suitable and exact, even more so than chemistry textbooks, without being exhaustive or all-comprehensive. But Barth is concerned with more than the admitted fact that our knowledge of God is partial. Accordingly he adds that language is neither suitable nor exact, though he claims that speech about revelation is comprehensible and clear "to a certain extent." This is extremely vague and completely unsatisfactory. It conveys nothing suitable or exact. If it is based on the remainder of the quotation, it seems to involve a misapprehension of fact. Barth asserts that the theologians were quite certain about the Trinity, but were uncertain about the language of the world in relation to the Trinity. Surely the reverse is nearer the case. Athanasius and Calvin had no

doubts as to theories of linguistics. They argued neither for nor against William M. Urban's theory that there is no such thing as a literal sentence; they had never heard the suggestion that all words have a physical and spatial origin, or even that poetry cannot be expressed in prose. And however much they insisted that man is a sinner, they certainly never questioned the suitability or asserted the sinfulness of language as such. On the other hand they did have doubts about the Trinity and the two natures in Christ. Like all young students of theology, brilliant as they were, they too had to puzzle things out. We can imagine the men of Chalcedon, perhaps before the council was convened, wondering whether there was a position between Nestorianism and Eutychianism. If it was relatively easy to see what theories the Biblical material ruled out, it was not easy, even for them, especially for them, to figure out for the first time what the Bible requires. The trouble centered in the complexity of the revelation, not in the inadequacy of language. Secondly, of course, there were difficulties of language. They wanted to formulate a credal statement that would be true to the Scripture; and on certain points, but not on all, they doubted whether this or that phrase was clear and exact. Of course this involved a choice of words and language, and to this extent one might say that they were uncertain about their language; but their uncertainty did not refer to a theory of linguistics that makes language a product of the anti-faith reason of man. The real difficulty, as it is with chemistry also, lies in the subject-matter, not in the natural capacity of words.

The controlling factor in this discussion should be the concepts of God and revelation. If God is supreme wisdom, if his Son is his Logos or Reason, if God desires to communicate truth and convey valuable information, then the general line of criticism just offered holds. But this concept of God and revelation is not unanimously adopted by contemporary theologians. Some of them have a horror of reason and deny that God has given any information to man. Maybe their God is a Gnostic Abyss and Silence, and Inexpressible Absolute, a night in which all cows are black. At any rate their revelation is not a matter of truth and their religion is not rational. The next chapter will discuss Barth's concept of revelation in detail; but here we must see to what extent his theory of language recedes from reason.

An Argument on Dogma

There is a passage of about a dozen pages (I 1, pp. 304-315), intensely interesting in itself and the more so as we try to lay bare its structure for the purpose of criticism, in which the values of language and clear thought are underrated. As before, Barth does not openly espouse irrationalism; he struggles against it; but the struggle itself discloses the force of the tendency.

Through a preceding argument he has come to the point at which he wishes to contrast his own idea of dogmatics both with the modernist and the Roman Catholic ideas. Dogmatics, he says, cannot be, as it is in the Roman Catholic Church, "an unfolding of the revealed truths immanent in the Church"; nor can it be an "exposition of the faith of the men united in the Church," as modernism has it. Both of these repudiate the Bible as "the absolute authority set up over against Church proclamation. Barth accepts "the possibility of visualizing the Word of God as an entity different from Church proclamation . . . in the fact that in the Church the Bible is read." Therefore dogmatics must be "the critical inquiry as to the agreement of Church proclamation, not with a standard of divine truth already known and proclaimed by the Church herself . . . but with the revelation attested in Holy Scripture."

This agreement itself is dogma—in the singular, and dogmatics is the science of dogma, not the science of dogmas. Aside from the last phrase quoted, "the revelation attested in Holy Scripture," which for reasons later to be expanded might have better remained simply "the Bible" as earlier in the quotation, Barth's distinction between Church proclamation and an "absolute authority" by which it should be tested, is excellent.

But then there opens an incomplete disjunction with many other complications, for which a word of preparation may be helpful. Naturally, Reformed theologians will welcome sound objections to Romanism, both with respect to particular dogmas and with respect to a conciliar or papal infallibility that underlies them. But if Barth's formulation is so broad as to include the Reformed position also, and in fact make all intelligible religion impossible, Calvinists of course will disagree. Barth's objection to Romanism here, as we may rephrase it, is that by claiming infallibility Rome makes its own

authority the equal of God's. No doubt the Romish claim is reprehensible; but orthodox Protestants must not immediately dismiss all further concern. They must ask whether in their own thought, buried below the surface, a claim to infallibility is made. This is not an easy question to answer. On the one hand, the Calvinist is most ready to acknowledge his sinfulness and ignorance; the heart even of the regenerate is deceitful above measure; and God has not promised him freedom from error. The Westminster Confession asserts that even "councils may err and many have erred." On the other hand, the Scripture is perspicuous; it was addressed to ordinary people, the poor, the slaves, the uneducated in Corinth and Rome. God obviously intended that they should understand it. How can an ordinary person make a mistake when he says that the Bible teaches the Virgin Birth? How could a Roman slave or a Corinthian business man be confused as to the fact that the New Testament says that Christ rose from the dead? Is not everyone infallible on these simple points? Or, could it be that when the Gospels say, "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said," and when the minister in church some Easter morning says the same words, the two instances of the same words mean different things, so that the first is true and the second is or may be false? If God's Word reports that David was King of Israel, must a young Sunday School teacher be fallible, be possibly or actually mistaken, when she says the same thing to the kiddies in the Beginners Department? But again, is it not always possible to be mistaken? If we can add two and two and get three, and we sometimes do, can we not be mistaken about the resurrection and King David? Barth is attacking a real problem. Let us follow his argument.

After the assertion that dogmatics measures Church proclamation against the revelation attested in the Scripture, Barth continues that dogmatics is not the science of dogmas, but the science of dogma. He dislikes the Roman idea that a dogma is a truth of revelation and that dogmatics is the combination of and commentary on these dogmas. Early in the east and only much later in the west the word dogma came to mean a doctrinal proposition. Deneffe and other modern Roman Catholics now define it as follows: *Dogma est veritas a Deo formaliter revelata et ab Ecclesia sive solemniter* (by an *ex cathedra* decision or conciliar decree) *sive ordinarie* (by the fact that it is generally taught in the Church without opposition) *definita*. In

the Catholic view dogmatics is consequently the systematic exposition of these revealed truths.

That there are such propositions and such expositions, even in Protestantism, Barth does not wish to deny. But he will not have dogmas to be the goal of dogmatics. "For dogmas are not *veritates a Deo formaliter revelatae*. In dogmas there speaks the Church . . . she defines (i.e., circumscribes in dogmas) revealed truth, the Word of God. And thereby out of the Word of God there comes the word of man . . . The Word of God is above dogma [dogmas?] as the heavens are above the earth" (I 1, p. 306). One reason for sharply separating human dogma from the truth of God is the similarity between orthodox and heretical propositions. Very probably Luther and Calvin thought that Nestorianism and Eutychianism were easily distinguishable from the orthodox Chalcedonian doctrine; but Barth apparently has trouble in seeing the difference and writes, "The closeness of *dogmata ecclesiastica* to *dogmata haereticorum* must surely recall at once the fundamental assailability of dogma as defined by the Church and keep at a distance any idea of an infallible dogma of this description." He also remarks that even for Romanism, without prejudice to the substantially closed character of revealed truth, the full number of dogmas is not yet known and defined by the Church; and also that unalterable and infallible truth does not attach to the formulae themselves, but to their material content. But this, as Barth remarks, is an ineffective admission, for Rome does not seriously distinguish between dogmas and the Word of God. On the contrary, in "grandiose isolation" Rome has "sequestered the Word of God," has "taken it under her own management, and has lost the capacity of listening to the voice of a Confronter. If it is this voice from opposite that should be heard as the criterion of what the Church says and does," Barth concludes, ". . . the dogma after which dogmatics inquires certainly cannot be the *veritas ab Ecclesia definita*. This *veritas* is itself an inquiry after dogma. . . . It cannot claim to be the dogma which is the goal of dogmatics" (I 1, p. 307).

It would be peculiar if an American Calvinist should step forward as the defender of Roman infallibility. Nor is this the intention. Yet it seems that the force of Barth's objection to Romanism here does not apply to the idea of infallibility as such, but to Rome's lost capacity to listen to the voice of God. Rome professes to accept the Bible, but in fact contradicts it. This is the real objection, and it remains even where, as in modernism, infallibility is repudiated.

Excursus. The question of infallibility, let us remark, extends beyond the nature of dogma, and Barth's attack on the former seems to have led him to an unnecessary position with respect to the latter. Although not usually recognized as such, a certain claim to infallibility meets us in our everyday affairs. When an accountant balances his books, does he not assume that his figures are correct? When a college professor hurries to class for fear that his students will disappear if he is late, does he not make judgments as to the time of day and the proclivities of students? When a chess club challenges another to a match, does any suspicion of fallibility impede its action? Cannot this club distinguish the *dogma ecclesiastica* that there actually is another club from the *dogma haeretica* that no other club exists? Must not all people act on the assumption that their beliefs are true? Now, with respect to Church proclamation, Barth makes a capital point that dogmatics would be merely a dialogue by the Church with herself, unless there is a voice from opposite. But when he claims "Thus the dogma after which dogmatics inquires cannot be the *veritas ab Ecclesia definita*," he adopts an unnecessary and confused position. There is not in reality any difference between a particular doctrine framed in theological or creedal language and an inquiry into the agreement of Church proclamation with the voice from opposite. The doctrinal formula is itself a statement of the agreement. Nor is ecclesiastical dogma so similar to heresy, as the force of Barth's great attack on modernism so clearly shows, that the elders are obliged to keep Kant and Feuerbach on the church rolls. Possibly the accountant has made a mistake in arithmetic, perhaps the college professor does not understand students, and it could be that no other chess club exists; but so convinced are we of the Westminster Confession's agreement with the Word of God, that the bare possibility of a slight mistake somewhere ought not to paralyze obvious action.

Accepting then part of what Barth says, we come to his second point, which touches more closely on language and propositions. Let us listen to his voice as it confronts us from opposite and see if we can make a suitable formulation and summary. "The dogma after which dogmatics inquires is not the truth of revelation, but is on the way to the truth of revelation . . . They are propositions which grasp and reproduce the truth of revelation only so far as they strive towards it. . . . The inner meaning of all possible propositions of the kind, the thing all dogmas mean to express when they strive towards the truth of revelation, is the dogma after which dogmatics inquires. In calling it the inner meaning, we as good as say that it is not itself a proposition, that it is not proclaimed at any time by any Church. It is what is intended in all possible propositions of the kind, it is the dogma for the sake of which the Church proclaims dogmas. Dogma signifies the essence, of which dogmas, as well as dogmatic proposi-

tions, i.e., the propositions of dogmatic science, claim to be manifestations, the essence from which real dogmas and real dogmatic propositions may arise, namely, when they reproduce it. Dogmas call upon it to give attention to dogma, they give it directions—just as the Church can give directions—to inquire after dogma. Upon a third and lowest grade it then builds its propositions, the scientifically dogmatic propositions. Dogmatic propositions, dogmas, and dogma have this in common; taken together they are not the truth of revelation, but dogma is . . . Dogma may thus be defined as Church proclamation so far as it really agrees with the Bible as the Word of God. If we knew about dogma, if we had dogma, then we would know and have the Word of God itself in a definite and definitely indicated form and manifestation of Church proclamation, because dogma is Church proclamation in real agreement with the Word of God. But a theology that would assert its knowledge and possession of dogma would be *theologia gloriae*, which ought not to claim to be the dogmatics of the Church. What it is faced with is always actual Church proclamation in the entire humanity of its form and manifestation on the one hand, and on the other hand the sign set up in the Church, namely, the promise and commandment of the Bible. And the task set it is the inquiry after the Word of God in Church proclamation and so the inquiry after dogma, after that attitude towards the Bible as the Word of God which is essential to Church preaching. Each answer, each realization of such an attitude and agreement could only be one of two things, either the event of the Word of God itself which dogmatics can neither presuppose nor postulate nor create, or one of the great illusions and prolepses in a dogmatics which is not aware that for all its presupposing, postulating, or attempts at creation it is nothing in respect of this event. . . . If inquiry ceased, if instead of dogmas and dogmatic propositions dogma itself took the boards, if one could exhibit the agreement of definite Church proclamation with the Word of God and therefore show the Word of God itself in this particular Church proclamation, then along with the *ecclesia militans* dogmatics would be at an end and the Kingdom of God would have dawned" (I 1, pp. 307-309).

This long quotation needs thoughtful study. If the reader will be so good as to go over it a second time, the analysis can proceed.

The passage is extremely unclear, and its unclarity is due to a strain of irrationalism that would not be expected to follow from an

emphasis on written words. Three points must be made. First, dogmatics is an intellectual activity of theologians; dogmas are the propositions which the theologians formulate and which Councils sometimes adopt. These dogmas reproduce the truth of revelation only insofar as they strive towards it. This thought of Barth implies that creedal statements can never be true; they can only strive toward the truth. Now, it is intelligible to say that a theologian strives toward the truth of something; but is there an intelligible sense in which a proposition can strive toward truth? Suppose a pupil in third grade says that two and two are three, and another pupil says that two and two are five. Do their answers strive toward the truth? And would "two plus two is six" be a lesser degree of striving than either of the other answers? Would it even be "more wrong"? Are not answers simply right or wrong? Are not unambiguous propositions simply true or false? Barth would seem therefore to have implied that all dogmas, all the results of dogmatics, are false. And if there are degrees of falsity, in the sense that five is closer to four than six is, still one could never know which proposition was "less false" without first knowing the correct answer. If therefore the dogmas of dogmatics are never true, no theologian could tell which dogma is striving most strenuously. The sermons of Calvin could not be judged to be nearer the truth than the sermons of Schleiermacher, and Barth could not be rationally preferred over Herrmann or the Pope.

Next, in addition to dogmatics and dogmas Barth asserts the existence of dogma. At the beginning of his second point he says that "the dogma after which dogmatics inquires is not the truth of revelation," though at the bottom of the same page he says that it is. The sense of the passage requires us to ignore the first and pay attention to the second assertion. Dogma is the truth of revelation. Only, of course, no theologian ever grasps dogma. Dogmas, the propositions of dogmatics, have an "inner meaning"; this inner meaning is the dogma; but since it is not the meaning of the proposition itself, it is not a proposition at all and is never at any time proclaimed by the Church. Is it not therefore something unknown and unknowable? Since also it is not a proposition, it is very hard, or rather impossible, to conceive how a proposition can strive toward it or agree with it. Barth in one sentence here speaks of dogmas arising from dogma, but he offers no suggestion as to how, even if one had dogma, one could proceed toward dogmas, nor how with dogmas one could approach,

agree with, or approximate dogma. The road is closed in both directions. Indeed a non-propositional inner meaning has no meaning at all. Knowledge and meaning always have the form of a proposition—or if significance is sometimes conveyed in an exclamation or a gesture, like shorthand, it may with little trouble be put into the ordinary sentence structure of a proposition. To prove that he knows botany, a student must make certain statements, often on an examination sheet, such as, “apples grow on trees and belong to the Rosaceae.” If he cannot make any such statements, he flunks and everybody concludes that he knows nothing about botany. It is no different when persons are the objects of knowledge, even though romantics wish to defend a peculiar type of “knowledge” especially for persons, different in essence from knowledge of things. But they talk nonsense, and in another place Barth admits it. Although it is not true of God, he says, yet “*zwischen dem Menschen und seinem Werk . . . zu unterschieden, ist eine unmögliche Abstraction . . . als man ein Werk erhebt oder verwirft, erhebt oder verwirft man jeweils auch einen Menschen*” (P.T. p. 9). In English: the distinction between a man and his work is an impossible abstraction; when one praises or condemns a work, he praises or condemns a man at the same time. This knowledge is obviously propositional. To prove that he knows Karl Barth, a critic must make certain statements, such as, Barth is a Swiss theologian, a kindly old gentleman, who has written intolerably long volumes. If a critic cannot make any such statements, everybody concludes that he does not know Karl Barth. Naturally one man may know Barth or botany better than another man does, and one may know this while another knows that. This is because one has greater information, or at least more important information. An American critic may not know Barth nearly so well as Brunner does; yet, without ever having met him, he probably knows Barth better than does the janitor at the University of Basel. This is because he can formulate more, or at least more important propositions than the janitor can. Knowledge consists of propositions, of predicates related to subjects, i.e., of truths. The meaning which the words designate is the object of knowledge. To talk of a different inner meaning, not itself a proposition, never proclaimed or thought, is a trait of irrationalism.

Now, third, though it may be the same two points over again, if dogma were a proposition, if it were dogmas or dogmatic formulas,

a summary of some theme in Scripture, it would be possible to estimate or perhaps determine its agreement with the Scripture; and if the Scripture is the Word of God, we could then perceive the agreement between the dogmas and the written Word of God. Note also that the agreement itself is a proposition. But according to Barth in this passage we will not know about or have dogma until we arrive in heaven, until the *ecclesia militans* comes to an end in the *theologia gloriae*. And the Word of God, to which dogma is supposed to agree, is not the Scripture, but some poorly described "event." This event is something that dogmatics can neither presuppose, postulate, nor create. Now, if this event were a direct verbal revelation by God to the prophets, in which God put his words into their mouths, then obviously dogmatics as a later study of these words could not create the event. But why dogmatics cannot presuppose it is a mystery. One would think that dogmatics would have to presuppose it. To put a pointed question, Is the agreement of the phrase in the Apostles Creed, "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate," with the Word of God merely an illusion? Is it as such even a prolepsis?

The passage under analysis now continues and concludes with a third point (I 1, pp. 309-315). Barth's main purpose is to oppose the Roman Catholic concept of dogmatics and dogma, but most of what he says applies with equal force to Luther and Calvin and to any sort of intelligible religion. It is the symptom, he says, of a wrong development which set in very early, that the concept of dogma was given the sense of "doctrinal proposition" instead of the sense of "behest" or "decree" which is so much more readily suggested by Biblical usage. This not too clear distinction between a behest or command and a doctrinal proposition controls the thought of his following pages. Examination of the argument will show that in one respect it is a faulty disjunction and in another respect the conclusion Barth draws from it is not commendable.

Granting for the sake of argument that Church dogmas are revealed truths, Barth questions whether a revealed truth can be the truth of a doctrinal proposition. His rhetorical questions imply that the truth of revelation is not like other truths, fixed as ἀλήθειδ, (*aletheia*), i.e., "as the unveiled state of a hidden characteristic in human thoughts, concepts, and judgments, and in the form thus limited and minted, held in preserve, so to speak, quite apart from

the event of its becoming revealed as truth." To think so, he insists, is to materialize and depersonalize the truth of revelation; this truth cannot be possessed in abstraction from the Person who reveals it . . . and further rhetoric to the same effect.

Now, as Barth tries to maintain this position, we must keep in mind certain questions. One would be whether the omnipotent God can or cannot speak to man in propositions. If he cannot, then apart from questions of omnipotence, Jesus Christ ceases to speak to us as God so soon as he addresses us in intelligible sentences. But if God can speak in sentences, and there is no logical impossibility in this supposition to obstruct omnipotence, then obviously a revealed truth may be a proposition. The Ten Commandments are indeed behests, and as such are not propositions and are neither true nor false: they are commands. But all predictive prophecy, all reference to past history, and all doctrinal explanation, must be propositional, and if revealed, must be true. Such truths are "minted" or "preserved" by being written down. Thus we have the fixed truth that David was King of Israel. Why this should be called materialization and depersonalization in a derogatory manner is hard to explain. One would think that accurate limitation in truth is desirable. Can then this truth be possessed in abstraction from the Person who reveals it? What does such a question mean? According to the epistle of James the demons believe that there is one God; they are not polytheists. Presumably God revealed this to them. They could not have known this fact apart from being informed. Do they then, or do they not possess this truth in abstraction from God? If in this case abstraction means apart from a work of redeeming grace, then they know this truth in abstraction, i.e., without being redeemed; and similarly unredeemed human beings may know some truths that God has revealed. If on the other hand by abstraction Barth means apart from God's furnishing the information, then neither the demons nor men can know this truth in abstraction, i.e., without having received it by revelation. But in any case it is still a proposition. The fact that God has given us certain information, such as the tri-personality of the Godhead, which we could not possibly have discovered by ourselves, does not in the least conflict with its being a proposition. Revelation does not change information into non-information. If this is "materialization" and "depersonalization," so let it be. It consists with God's being a rational rather than an irrational entity. Barth, how-

ever, derides doctrinal propositions as being "neutral" and "theory for theory's sake," insisting that the purely material, impersonal presence of truth in a proposition makes the equation between revealed truth and doctrinal proposition doubtful and more than doubtful.

The paragraph immediately following (p. 311) seems to contradict what Barth has just said; at least it seems to contradict the interpretation that the present author has placed upon Barth's words. In order to avoid merely neutral truths, in dealing with which a man has nothing to do with God, Barth wishes dogma to be understood primarily as a command. "And so as a truth which we may possess as a truth only by it being told us by God . . . And so as a dogma, which, of course, is also a "doctrinal proposition" (it is not a question of excluding that meaning; why should we? Why should not also and particularly a behest be able to instruct us?) but a doctrinal proposition which can teach us and be a dogma, only so far as it 'goes forth' from God . . . and comes to us in the act of obedience (or does not come to us in the act of disobedience, teaches us nothing, does not as dogma exist for us) . . ."

In regard to the apparent contradiction between this paragraph and the preceding paragraphs, let us try to make clear that an intelligible religion is not compromised by human inability to discover truth and the consequent necessity of dependence on information given or revealed. When Barth says that we may possess truths only by being told by God, no adverse criticism can be made from a Reformed viewpoint. Similarly there could be no great objection to calling a dogma a behest, if it is a proposition also. And Barth here says explicitly that he does not intend to exclude from dogma the meaning of doctrinal proposition. But in spite of this explicit statement, there is so much that contradicts it, by implication at least, that one must reflect on the possibility that Barth is inconsistent. For one thing, the last phrase of the quotation suggests that we can know a dogma only if we obey its behest. If we are disobedient, the dogma does not "come to us" and therefore "teaches us nothing" and "does not as dogma exist for us." This position is not Biblical, nor is it rational. Previous mention was made of the demons who believe in monotheism. They are clearly disobedient; but they know that there is one God and they also knew that Jesus is the Son of God and were persuaded that they faced a future time of torment. Disobedience

did not prevent them from knowing these doctrinal propositions. If it now be said that we cannot infer human possibilities from the psychology of the demons, other Scriptural references must be produced in which unbelievers are said to know revealed truths. Probably Cain would be the first good example. He knew that his sacrifices were unacceptable; he knew that the penalty for murder was capital punishment; and whatever else he may or may not have known, these two were revealed propositions from which he learned something in disobedience. With the first example coming so early in the Bible, it cannot be difficult to find a few more in the later books (cf. Dan. 5:22). This disposes of one restriction that Barth wished to impose and leaves us with a less encumbered view.

There still remains the explicit assertion that a dogma is a doctrinal proposition, though it is primarily a behest; for why should not a behest be able to instruct us? Now, commands as such are never true or false; they cannot serve as premises or conclusions of syllogisms; they do not in strictness give information. The situation in which we receive them, however, may enable us to derive some information from them. When God gave the Ten Commandments, he began with the informative proposition, I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt. On this basis the Ten Commandments convey the information that God requires us to refrain from idolatry and murder and to keep the Sabbath Day and honor our parents. But not all dogmas are behests in this sense. Behests may give information, but not all information is a behest to do something, something overt and external. The Trinity is a dogma; but it requires a great stretch of ingenuity to find a behest in it. Effectual calling is an important Reformed dogma; but it includes no activity on the part of man. Now, it may be said that all these dogmas are behests that they be believed. They may not command external actions, but they command the intellectual action of believing them. But this is precisely the kind of behest that Barth explicitly rejects. "If our demand or proposal in this connection is to be taken seriously—as seriously as we naturally mean it—if the doctrine of dogma should really be regarded as a behest (and not of course its behest, once more, as a doctrine to be contemplated . . .) it must then be immediately clear that the dogma set up by the Church herself cannot itself be this behest" (p. 312). Now, if the doctrine of the Trinity or of effectual calling is only secondarily a proposition, being

primarily a behest, but not a behest to be believed as a doctrine, then what is this behest? What, aside from believing, are we supposed to do? Barth does not tell us. And if the behest is really different from the proposition to be believed, then it is hard to see how the dogma can be a proposition, even "also." Barth himself recognizes this, to the extent at least that he admits that "there is no room for our views on Catholic terrain." There is really no room for this part of his view on Evangelical terrain, either.

Barth is very definite. He may not be too clear how dogma can be a doctrinal proposition also, but that dogma is not a proposition and that doctrinal propositions cannot be true is quite clear. "The material, impersonal truth-in-itself ascribed to dogma, its objectivity for contemplation . . . is what for us is the mark of a truth conditioned and confined not only by man's creatureliness but also by his sin, in contrast with which the truth of God in his revelation is quite a different truth. . . . We claim to know the truth of the Word of God from the witness of Holy Scripture as a truth that is sovereign in quite another way" (p. 313).

Now, aside from the derogatory terms, material and impersonal, terms which in this context convey no definite meaning, the objectivity of truth-in-itself, the fact that a proposition is not a falsity and an illusion, would seem to be a mark of distinction. Barth takes it as a mark not only of man's creatureliness but also of sin. But if all words and propositions are sinful, then Jesus Christ committed sin and told lies every time he spoke. The words of the prophets and apostles are also false. How then from this false witness can anyone arrive at a different sort of truth in "quite another way"? Both the way and the nature of this different truth remain obscure. Furthermore, if language is creaturely and sinful, what will be the nature of our conversation in heaven? If Barth replies that in heaven we shall no longer be sinners and therefore will be able to speak the truth, then the difficulty does not lie with words and language, and in this case God can use language now without illusion and falsity. Or if Barth replies that our creatureliness remains, the problem remains too. In heaven as now on earth we cannot speak the truth to God and God cannot speak to us, literally speak, as Barth earlier admitted that it is not a figure of speech to say that God speaks.

Barth makes life in the Church all the more difficult and religion all the more irrational, when he adds that dogma taken as a behest

is still not a behest of God. It is only a behest imposed by sinners assembled in the Church, and as such surrounded and permeated by the utter ambiguity, frailty, and perversion of human behests. But if the behest is ambiguous, one would not know what to do; and if it is perverted, it would be better not to obey. For this reason Barth's own conclusion is devoid of meaning. He says, "Therefore, since knowledge of real dogma will never come to pass before the end of all things, the meaning of our search for dogma must be, not primarily the search of a pupil who is anxious for his thought to agree with the superior thoughts of his teacher, but primarily the question of a servant who has to inquire into the agreement of his action with the purposes of his master, in order then, by this occasion, to discover for certain how to learn something he did not know before" (p. 314). For certain? Everything in these last dozen pages turns us from certainty to utter ambiguity, frailty, and perversion. Learn something he did not know before? This will have to await the end of all things, and even then due to the creatureliness of language what we learn cannot be the truth of God. And, finally, the disjunction between pupil and servant is both poor and useless. A pupil is a servant whose duty it is to conform his thought to the superior, the true thought of his master. The Christian life is not one exhausted in overt and external obedience. Being honest and refusing to steal is of course a part of the Christian life; but meditation, contemplation, believing the truth is also obedience, and this is the better part such as Mary chose. In any case, the utter ambiguity of Barth's behest makes all kinds of obedience impossible.

Propositions and Words

Lest anyone still doubt that Barth's position, or that one half of Barth's inconsistent position, separates between the truth of God's revelation and the truth of propositions, several further references will be given.

"The equation, God's Word is God's Son, makes anything doctrinaire in regarding the Word of God radically impossible. In it and only in it is a real and effective barrier raised against what can be made of proclamation according to the Roman Catholic conception or of Holy Scripture according to the theory of later Old Protestantism, a fixed total of revealed propositions to be systematized like the

sections of a corpus of law" (I 1, p. 156). Note here, as was suggested in the last analysis, that Barth rejects not only Romanism in this theory of truth, but also "later Old Protestantism." Original old Protestantism, i.e., just plain Reformation theology, in fact the Christian view in all ages conflicts with Barth's view of a non-propositional truth.

"The real content of God's speech . . . is thus never to be conceived and reproduced by us as a general truth. We may and must of course, as readers of Scripture and hearers and bearers of proclamation, work with definite general conceptual material, apparently repeating or anticipating what God has said . . . We may do this in words of our own coining or in Scripture quotations. But in that case we must continually be reflecting that this conceptual material is our own work, and not to be confused with the fullness of the Word of God itself, which we are thinking of and waiting for: it only points to that. What God said was always quite different . . . from what we may say and must say to ourselves and to others about its content" (p. 159-160). Now, in the Apostles' Creed we say, "suffered under Pontius Pilate"; but according to Barth God said something quite different. What did God say, then? (cf. pp. 199, 205).

In addition to these two references which deprecate propositions, there are two or three which stress again the inadequacy of language, this time not so much because of sin, but rather because of the nature of God.

"The sufficiency of our thought-form, and of the perception presupposed in it, and of the word-form based on it, collapses altogether in relation to this God . . . He is not identical with any of the objects which can become the content of the images of our external or inner perception" (II 1, p. 190). To be sure, two pages later Barth says, "We must not on any account draw from this statement the conclusion that there is no true knowledge of God, and that we are forced to renounce the undertaking to view and conceive God and therefore to speak of him." And he continues in this vein for a page and a half. But though this is what he says, it is difficult to see how the unwanted conclusion can logically be avoided. On the position that what we say and what God says are always quite different, and on the assumption that God speaks the truth, it seems to follow that anything we say is not the truth. If God has all truth and if we have nothing that God has, then surely we have no truth at all. Although in another

book Barth had accepted the Hegelian dictum that All is rational, here he says, "There is not, then, as A. E. Biedermann and the Hegelian school in general supposed, a pure conceptual language which leaves the inadequate language of images behind, and which, accessible to the initiates of this high art, is, as such, the language of truth" (p. 195). Then is not the unwanted conclusion necessary? English or German is the only language we have; it is inadequate because bound to sensory images; "in fact, the language of the strictest conceptuality participates in the inadequacy of all human language"; therefore must we not conclude that all propositions are beside the truth, all thoughts expressed in these propositions are beside the truth, and that human "knowledge" of God is not knowledge?

This criticism is by no means strained. In another place Barth says, "our words require a complete change of meaning, even to the extent of becoming the very opposite in sense, if in their application to God they are not to lead us astray" (II 1, p. 307). If therefore we say that God is just, we must in order not to be led astray understand ourselves to mean that God is unjust. Unfortunately, the phrase, God is unjust, is human language also, and must be turned into its opposite, God is just, and we find ourselves on a merry-go-round. This is irrationalism.

Barth's unfortunate concessions, which of course he does not regard as unfortunate but rather insists upon, derive from a confused theory of language, which in turn depends on what is perhaps only a semi-conscious acceptance of Aristotelian empiricism. But semi-conscious or fully intentional, we can deal only with what he has written—his words.

Words, Barth teaches, point away from themselves toward facts or objects. "We do not speak for the sake of speaking, but . . . for the sake of what we denote or intend by our speaking. To listen to a human word spoken to us does not mean only that we have cognition of the word as such" (I 2, p. 464). This of course is true. *Der Hund*, *le chien*, and *the dog* are three different words that point to the same object; and in ordinary conversation no one is concerned with the sound of the word: it is the meaning of the sound, the object that the sound designates, which demands our attention. But this elementary item of linguistics does not seem to be what Barth has in mind. For he immediately continues, "The understanding of it cannot consist merely in discovering on what presuppositions, in what situation,

in what linguistic sense and with what intention, in the actual context, and in this sense with what meaning the other has said this or that . . . These things do not mean that I penetrate the word as such." Apparently Barth is not talking about words, for what else is needed in "penetrating" a word than to understand its referent? If we know the situation, the linguistic sense, the speaker's intention in the actual context, what further is there to understand? But Barth protests, "If I were to confuse this preparation with the listening, understanding, and expounding, and concern myself only with the word as such and the one who speaks it, how I should deceive myself!" What else has Barth in mind? Obviously he cannot be speaking merely of words as sounds. Does he perchance mean thoughts or ideas? Does he mean that the idea of dog, or of justification and reconciliation, point away from the idea of dog and reconciliation to something else? If so, why use the word dog, why think the idea dog, instead of the other referent intended?

What Barth may mean is extremely difficult to grasp. But this is what he says: "We can speak meaningfully of hearing a human utterance only when it is clear to us in its function of indicating something that is described or intended by the word, [so far so good, but what does the next clause mean?] and also when this function has become an event confronting us, when therefore by means of the human word we ourselves in some degree perceive the thing described or intended." The difficulty with this last clause is that it is intended to point out something beyond understanding the function of the word as it refers to an object. Beyond the intention of the speaker in the actual context, we must also have an "event," a "confrontation." Does Barth mean that the hearer must have a visual image of a dog? If he does, then it is clear that we can never grasp the word or idea of justification because justification, unlike a dog, is not a visual object and we can have no image of it. But at the same time we could have no understanding of the general conic or the square root of minus one, for these too are not visual objects. And furthermore, there are people who have no visual imagery at all. Yet they can do some mathematics, talk of dogs, and even write a book on Barth.

Although time and again Barth inveighs against deriving theological content from "philosophy," i.e., from any independent anthropological position, by any analytico-synthetic procedure, on the basis

of unrevealed and unbiblical science or history, nonetheless his theory of language and the epistemology on which it depends violate his professed standards. He has adopted a theory of images and a process of abstraction that is more Aristotelian than Biblical. Two previous references (II 1, pp. 190, 195) have already shown the importance of images: one denies that God can be any of the objects that give content to our external or internal images; that therefore our thought forms collapse in relation to God; and that therefore we cannot conceive God. In other words, concepts depend on images. The other reference is the converse, namely, there is no pure conceptual language beyond the language of images.

The same section contains broader epistemological statements to the effect that knowledge is based on images. After asserting that our knowledge of God "formally and technically cannot be distinguished from what we call knowledge in other connections," and that the fact that God is its object "does not mean either the abrogation, abolition, or alteration of human cognition as such, and therefore of its formal and technical characteristics," he continues, "But human cognition is fulfilled in views and concepts. Views are the images in which we perceive objects as such. Concepts are the counter-images with which we make these images of perception our own by thinking them, i.e., by arranging them. Precisely for this reason they and their corresponding objects are capable of being expressed by us" (II 1, p. 181). Note here the representational theory of truth: we do not directly perceive the object of knowledge; we perceive it only in an image. This implies too that the object of knowledge is not a truth or proposition, but a sensible object, such as a color or sound, a tree or a song. And for this reason there will be great difficulty in explaining the possibility of a knowledge of God. There is also a great difficulty in the representational theory in explaining the knowledge of a tree or song.

The difficulty of knowing God is indicated on another page: "God cannot be conceived, i.e., cannot become the content of a concept formed by us, in so far as we think of the ability and capacity of our conceiving as such. . . . We cannot conceive God because we cannot even contemplate him. He cannot be the object of one of those perceptions to which our concepts, our thought forms and finally our words and sentences are related" (II 1, p. 186). And again, "The pictures (!) in which we view God, the thoughts in which we think

him, the words with which we can define him, are in themselves unfitted to this object and thus inappropriate to express and affirm the knowledge of him" (II 1, p. 188). Then again, "It is settled that as such our images of perception, thought and words neither are nor can be images of God. They become this. They become truth. But they do not do so of themselves; they do it wholly and utterly from their object, not by their own capacity but by that of their object" (II 1, p. 194).

It is of course evident that Barth wants to preserve some sort of knowledge of God. But for this purpose it is not enough to say that perceptual images can become images of God. One wishes to know how this can be. Nor is it sufficient to say that this can be because God does it. The problem here is similar to that of God's drawing a plane square with three lines. We are not denying the omnipotence of God when we say that even God cannot draw a plane square with three lines. The trouble lies, not in God's power, but in the nonsense of the problem. A three sided square is a self-contradiction. Each word by itself is a good English word, but this particular combination of English words makes no sense. One might as well ask, Can God typewriter erase with through paint brush under? It makes no sense to ask whether God can do this, because the this itself makes no sense, sets no problem, deserves no answer. Similarly to say that God can make a perceptual image to become an image of himself is to say something totally unintelligible. There is no more an image of God than there is a three sided square. Therefore any attempt to raise some sort of knowledge of God on the basis of perception is doomed to failure. To defend the possibility of a knowledge of God, what is needed is a non-Aristotelian epistemology.

Barth is aware of these difficulties in another connection. Because the connection is other, it is not clear how far we can take all Barth says as indicating his own position, and how far his remarks are merely *ad hominem*. But in any case the gap between representation and object is brought to notice.

The idealistic theologian Biedermann, after his system of thought forced him to define "God" as an impersonal absolute, aimed to preserve some personality to God by means of a subjective representation that did not conform to the objective truth. Barth objects that the distinction between concept and representation cannot be substantiated in such a way that under the term concept there is de-

scribed the comprehension of objective truth, under the term representation that of a merely subjective truth, the two of them being mutually related as higher and lower steps of the same perception. "Can even the purest concept," he says, "be more than a representation purified as far as possible from all intuitive evidence, a representation made as mathematical as can be? To what extent in the concept are we really on a higher step of the knowledge of truth? . . . The difference between concept and representation can at best be only a difference of clarity; and how often must the question be asked whether the representation does not enjoy a higher degree of clarity than the concept? . . . How do we come to speak of stages in the knowledge of truth instead of a contradiction of true knowledge against false and false against true?" (II 1, p. 295). This is all a telling objection against Biedermann. Is it not also of some force against Barth himself?

In another place Barth discusses anthropomorphism. The early fathers, and everybody else, recognize that we speak of God humanly when we speak of his arms, his mouth, or even his remembering and forgetting. But it is possible to overemphasize the impropriety of such language, says Barth. When theologians make an effort to avoid such expressions, it is because they think that abstract concepts are not so improper, and that negative concepts, such as immutability, infinity, and incomprehensibility have a genuine propriety. But this contrast is not true. "For spiritual, i.e., abstract concepts are just as anthropomorphic as those which indicate concrete perception. As a characteristic of human language about God 'anthropomorphic' necessarily has the comprehensive meaning of that which corresponds to the form of man, and does not, therefore, correspond to God" (II 1, p. 222). But if it is no more proper to say that God is righteous than to say that God has arms and hands, on the ground that all language corresponds to the form of man and no language corresponds or applies to God, what is the use of talking about God at all? Nothing said is true, nothing can be true, because all language is improper.

The quotation on anthropomorphism is embedded in a long section on *The Veracity of Man's Knowledge of God*. This section with its wealth of material is much too extensive to be included in the present chapter. Here the sole point is that Barth's theory of language and of knowledge, despite his earnest protestations that man can

really know God, make that knowledge impossible; and therefore if one wishes to maintain that knowledge of God can occur, it will be necessary to find another theory of linguistics and epistemology. Let the reader be warned that the quotations here made do not give Barth's full position; but if anyone complain that Barth has said some things quite different from those now reported, such a one simply confirms the thesis that Barth is inconsistent. Consider the following.

Defending the veracity of human knowledge of God, Barth asserts that "we do not have to do with him only in a loose way, or at random, or with the threat of mistakes from unknown sources, or with the reservation that in reality everything might be quite different, but in a way which is right, which formally as well as materially cannot be separated from the matter itself, and therefore in this respect too, validly, compulsorily, unassailably, and trustworthily" (II 1, p. 208). This is such a strong statement, with its exclusion of mistakes from unknown sources and with its assurance that not everything might be quite different, that one is tempted to take it as a claim to the infallibility that Barth had denied previously. He continues, "Our undertaking to view and conceive God will not, then, involve self-deception, and our attempt to speak of God will not involve the deception of others." But the very next sentence destroys the force of these fine words. "We shall not want to speak of more than an undertaking and attempt, and therefore not of an undertaking that has 'succeeded.' Our viewing and conceiving of God and our speaking of him will never be a completed work showing definitive results." But if there are no definitive results, at all, how can we maintain assurance that not everything might be quite different? How can we be sure that we are not deceived? How can we claim any *knowledge* of God?

Three pages later (p. 211) he again tries to solve his dilemma by an appeal to omnipotence. "And if our views and concepts are impotent to apprehend him because they are ours, because in themselves and as such they are capable of apprehending only world-reality and not his reality, even in this their impotence they cannot imply any real hindrance to his power to reveal himself to us and therefore to give himself to be known." Once again, let it be repeated, if our concepts are developed by some such process as Aristotelian abstraction from sensorily given and imaginatively refined "primary

substances," so that by their very nature, their very construction, they can apprehend only the things of this world and cannot be applied to God, then no omnipotence can alter them. Omnipotence might indeed give us a different capacity, a different method of learning, a different epistemology. Omnipotence has in fact done so, if we know the least thing about God. But it is nonsense, it is irrational, to ask omnipotence to draw a three-sided square or to reveal knowledge in a situation which by definition excludes knowledge.

Essentially similar but a little more obviously self-contradictory is a later page in the same section. "In our knowledge of God, whether in thought or speech, we always use some kind of views, concepts, and words . . . As human productions they do not stand in any real relationship to this object, nor have they any power to comprehend it. As there is a general incongruence between God and man, there is here a particular incongruence between God as the known and man as the knower. If there is a real knowledge, from our side, it is in this incongruence, and, therefore, in the overcoming of this incongruence. But it cannot be overcome from man's side. The overcoming is therefore from the side of God as the known. . . . How do we come to think, by means of our thinking, that which we cannot think at all by this means? How do we come to say, by means of our language, that which we cannot say at all by this means? The fact that we do actually think it and say it is the sure promise in which we are placed by God's revelation, which we may and shall apprehend in faith; the event, which is continually before us, of real knowledge of God" (II 1, p. 220). Naturally Barth intends the two rhetorical questions to be pleasantly paradoxical. No one can mistake Barth's skill in using language. But pleasant, arresting language is not enough. "The fact that we do actually think it and say it" is not just a sure promise that evokes our awe before God; the fact that we have some knowledge of God is a refutation of Barth's theory of language and knowledge. (Cf. I 2, p. 750).

Barth's unbiblical epistemology—for who will defend the thesis that Aristotelian abstraction and imagination are proclaimed by the prophets and apostles?—forces him into most embarrassing arguments. "We are enquiring into the relationship between what we may say about God with our words which in themselves describe only the creaturely, and . . . what must be said of him in words which are not at our disposal" (II 1, p. 226). Now, pray tell, how can we use

words which are not at our disposal? Is this not an embarrassing position in which to find oneself? But Barth is not altogether blind to it and he is very courageous. "We can also say what is to be said about this relationship [the relationship between our words and the words not at our disposal] only with our words which have reference to the creaturely. Parity, disparity, and analogy are all equally such creaturely words, and therefore quite insufficient in themselves to say what is to be said at this point where we have to do with God and the creature. Nevertheless a selection has to be made." He then asserts that analogy is preferable to parity and disparity, even though "the one is actually as insufficient as the others." All three words presuppose a comparison of objects, he says, and God is not comparable with any object. The solution, as Barth sees it, is that God has revealed himself. The knowledge he gives us in revelation includes the knowledge of the relationship between our words and words not at our disposal. Therefore there is a word to describe this relationship, and apparently the revealed word is analogy. Of course, in the doctrine of the Trinity the words parity and disparity are useful; but not here: "they obviously (!) cannot be used." Hence analogy must be the correct word. But "in itself and as such it is no better than the words parity and disparity . . . It is not therefore correct in itself even in this context. It becomes correct in this context because the relationship (posited in God's true revelation) which we have here to express in some sense attracts this word to itself, giving it in the sphere of our words, which are insufficient to be used in this way, the character of a designation for the divine reality of this relationship." And if this is not embarrassing enough, the next few sentences are so utterly absurd that it is difficult to believe that any sane man wrote them. "It is not a relationship of either parity or disparity, but of similarity. This is what we think and this is what we express as the true knowledge of God, although in faith we still know and remember that everything that we know as 'similarity' is not identical with the similarity meant here. Yet we also know and remember, and again in faith, that the similarity meant here is pleased to reflect itself in what we know as similarity and call by this name, so that in our thinking and speaking similarity becomes similar to the similarity posited in the true revelation of God (to which it is, in itself, not similar) and we do not think and speak falsely but rightly when we describe the relationship as one of similarity" (II 1, p. 226).

Skepticism

No further criticism will be offered of a similarity that is not similar to ordinary similarity; but before some concluding remarks are made on the skepticism of this position it may be appropriate to insert a note on the idea that God is not similar to anything and therefore cannot be known through our ordinary and only categories. In several places Barth insists that *Deus non est in genere*. "God cannot be compared to anyone or anything. He is only like himself" (II 1, p. 376). Two things need to be said. Well, a third thing might be that all this presupposes the Aristotelian theory of genera, the distinctness of the ten categories, and the impossibility of cross classification among them.¹ But the first of the two points is that a blank denial of similarity between God and men is unbiblical. It is vain to press a verse, such as "To whom will ye liken me?" beyond its import. Taken out of its context and considered literally, the question may be answered by "Like as a father pitieth his children." Although it is such an elementary point, it seems often to be forgotten that object *x* can be both like and not like object *y*. It sounds self-contradictory, like saying that a plane figure is both a square and not a square; and perhaps the form of the words obscures the difference. But just as a cat is like and not like a dog, so God is like and not like a man. This leads to the second thing that needed to be said. If in spite of this previous consideration, someone still insists that God is in no genus or class, that no predicate can be attached to him, that he is similar to nothing whatever, then does it not follow that God is Totally Other? And if Totally Other, God is totally unknowable. Now, Barth in his later writings has rejected the idea of Totally Other (H. G. p. 42), but either this rejection took place after he had written most of the *Church Dogmatics*, or, more probably, the rejection of the earlier idea did not prevent its influence from continuing in many a passage. But whatever the chronology of Barth's development may be, this denial of similarity, like the idea of the Totally Other, makes knowledge of God impossible.

Possibly the skepticism of this position is somewhat hidden from its advocates by their substitution for knowledge of something that is not knowledge. After saying that our knowledge of God is true because it participates in the truth of God's revelation (II 1, pp. 214-

¹ cf. my *Thales to Dewey* pp. 108-112 for some animadversions thereupon.

215), he adds concerning participation, "It is therefore right and proper that among our more detailed definitions we should give priority to the fact that basically it can consist only in the offering of our thanks . . . Our knowledge of God as participation in the veracity of his revelation consists in an offering of our thanks" (*ibid.*, p. 216). The same words are repeated on the next two pages. This idea is then carried further. "Now if participation of our knowledge of God in the veracity of his revelation consists in the offering of our thanks, we shall have to go rather further back and say that it will always be also an act of wondering awe" (*ibid.*, p. 220). These lines are disconcerting. How can knowledge, i.e., belief in or acceptance of a true proposition, depend on giving thanks or feeling awe? This is not true in mathematics. Nor can it be true in theology. The devils have a knowledge of God, yet they do not give thanks, even though they may feel awe. The Pharisees on earth and Dives in hell had knowledge, but they do not meet Barth's requirements. Is there not here a confusion between two different things?

Take another section, *The Knowability of the Word of God* (I 1, pp. 213 ff.). Barth begins by insisting that the Word of God can be known, but only in the Church. Apparently Dives cannot know the Word of God; and whether the Pharisees are in the Church along with Feuerbach is difficult to say. But the Word can be known. Knowledge, however, is not precisely knowledge. Perhaps it is intended to be more; possibly it will turn out to be less. Let us see what Barth says. "By the knowledge of an object by men we understand the proof of their acquaintance with its reality in respect of its being there (or its existence) and in respect of its being thus and thus (or its nature). But 'proof of their acquaintance' implies that the reality of the object in question, its existence and its nature, now becomes, while true in itself, somehow and with some degree of clarity and definition also true for them. Their acquaintance with it from being an accidental becomes a necessary, from being an external becomes an inward determination of their own existence. . . . Its trueness has come home directly to them personally, has become their property. And at the same time they themselves have become the property of its trueness. This event, this verification or proof we call, to distinguish it from mere knowings, knowledge. A knowing becomes knowledge when the man becomes a responsible witness to its content." Then, a few pages later: "We shall have to frame the concept of knowledge . . . so generally, with such philosophical and epistemolo-

gical indefiniteness that the possibility is kept open of any revision, restriction, or reversal that might befall from the side of the object of knowledge actually under discussion at this point. When previously knowledge was defined as self-authenticating acquaintance in its subject with the reality of the object, by that must be meant a mere indication of the epistemological problem and not an interpretation of it in advance. Any interpretation at this stage would simply imply philosophical and epistemological determination. But in such a determination the problem ought not to be anticipated here . . . The meaning of knowledge as knowledge of the Word of God must on no account be introduced into an investigation of this question in the form of an ultimatum." Fr. Traub reproaches Barth in this matter, and Barth answers with some rhetorical questions. Then he continues: "It might be the result of the peculiarity of this object of knowledge that the concept of the knowledge of it might literally not be commensurable in an ultimate sense with the concept of the knowledge of other objects, or with a general concept of knowledge, but that it admitted of definition at all only from the side of its object" (I 1, pp. 214, 216-217).

It may be difficult to grasp the force of this passage at the first reading. But a review of it shows unmistakably that Barth does not want to tie down the word knowledge, when used in a religious context, to anything resembling the ordinary meaning of the word. Therefore the line of criticism has been that skepticism lurks behind Barth's many assertions of the possibility of knowledge because he is not really talking about knowledge. A paragraph back he was talking about thanksgiving and awe. Note here in the last sentence quoted the hint that knowledge of the Word of God is not knowledge in the sense in which knowledge of mathematics or botany is knowledge. Barth's knowledge might literally not be commensurable with a general concept of knowledge. But if the two are different experiences, if they are not commensurable, if they do not both fall under the same concept, why should the same name be given to them? Call one knowledge, call the other something else. The question, What do we know about God? is a legitimate question; but the answer, we give thanks and hold him in awe, is not satisfactory. For this reason it seems highly proper and in fact necessary to introduce a question on the meaning of knowledge, even in the form of an ultimatum. One wishes to know what an author is talking about. If the author uses a common word, but confesses that he is not using it in the sense that

other people regularly carry in mind, and then declines to say what his sense is, keeping the concept so fluid that it remains open not only to revision and restriction, but also to reversal, the student has a hard time figuring out the meaning.

There is one expedient by which Barth might defend himself against the charge of making God unknowable. The knowledge of God might be separated from the knowledge of Botany or Physics on the ground that the latter knowledge, rather than the former, is not knowledge. That is to say, one might adopt a thoroughly skeptical attitude toward science. Science is tentative; its pronouncements change, and in the twentieth century they have changed with great rapidity, over a wide extent, and in the most important particulars. There is also little likelihood that what is now published in science textbooks will remain acceptable fifty years from now. Hence science is not knowledge; and there is no general concept of knowledge that can include the changing opinions of scientists and the unchanging revealed truths of God. But Barth may not care to avail himself of this defense. At the beginning his attitude seemed to be to accept science at face value, to take it as a continuing tradition equally venerable with that of the Church, a tradition and a culture so strongly entrenched that dogmatics was restricted to a conversation within the Church. Barth hesitated to meet the outside world head-on. This leaves us with two sets of propositions: those of natural science and those of dogmatics. If they are both knowledge, knowledge ought to have a single meaning. Or on the other hand Barth might join science and dogmatics by asserting that the propositions of dogmatics are as changeable as the laws of science. He has in many places spoken as if nothing in dogmatics can avoid revision, as if infallibility is impossible for man, and no doctrine is a final achievement. But in this case too, if science and dogmatics are thus on a level, all the more it follows that the term knowledge should have a single meaning.

Barth seemed to avoid skepticism when he designated revelation as information: "God's revelation is authentic information about God because it is first-hand information" (II 1, p. 210), thereby suggesting that what is revealed is a set of truths that are understood in the same way that any other informative sentences are understood. It is also true that when he lists the nine aspects of the experience or the acknowledgment of the Word of God, he puts first "the concept of knowledge. This must be so, because the Word of God is primarily and predominantly language" (I 1, p. 234); and this reference to

language suggests to the ordinary reader propositions such as David was King of Israel, and Christ rose, leaving the tomb empty. Knowledge of these is knowledge in the most ordinary sense. What then can we make of it all, when we discover in the last long quotation that Barth's knowledge is simply not knowledge?

There is another criticism that can be made of Barth's concept, or lack of concept, of knowledge. The point of criticism cannot be documented so well as the previous points have been; yet it is of considerable importance in epistemological discussions and is not out of place even here. Various philosophers, and Barth's phraseology sometimes suggests that he is among them, entertain an Eleatic concept of truth. They think of it as a Parmenidean unit, after the analogy of a physical thing. In opposition to subjective idealism Plato made the point, a good point too, that if we think, we must think something, and something that exists. But when this existing object of thought is imagined to be like a physical object, instead of being a truth or proposition, the theory becomes impossible. Botany is then treated as a plant, which we can see as a whole, even though its smaller parts are obscure and out of focus. Instead of admitting a clear knowledge of some parts, or some propositions of mathematics, and also admitting complete ignorance of other parts or propositions, these philosophers speak as if they have a foggy view of the whole. The result of this type of epistemology is found in Plotinus. So impressed was he with the unity of the object of knowledge, that he had to rise above knowledge to experience the unity. For him the duality of subject and predicate in a proposition was a flaw and a sign of inferiority. But he was gracious enough to tell his readers that experience of the One was not knowledge. It was a mystic trance, inexpressible and unintelligible.

Christianity, on the other hand, if the Bible is as authoritative as Barth often says it is, should develop its epistemology and theory of language from the information contained in the Scriptures. Aside from imperative sentences and a few exclamations in the Psalms, the Bible is composed of propositions. These are information about God and his dealings with men. No hint is given that they are symbolic of something inexpressible. No suggestion is made that they are merely pointers to something else. They are given to us as true, as truths, as the objects of knowledge. Let linguistics, epistemology, and theology conform.

VI

THE WORD OF GOD IN ITS THREEFOLD FORM

Although the charge of skepticism has been vigorously pressed against Barth's theory of language and epistemology, there still remains a possibility that he can escape these accusations through his views on revelation. That these views are somewhat complex is indicated, but only barely, by the title of the present chapter, which reproduces the title of Barth's section (I 1, pp. 98-140). Indeed his views are much more intricate than a simple mention of a threefold form of itself would suggest.

In addition to the complexity of this section there is another embarrassment. Some of Barth's faithful disciples might complain that Vol. I, Part 1, with this section in it, was written long ago; that it does not represent Barth's more mature views; and that therefore its deficiencies should not now be charged against the author. To a certain extent this complaint is justified. In I 2, pp. 457-470 Barth again discusses Holy Scripture; and of course there are many shorter incidental references. Nevertheless these later pages extend and amplify rather than contradict the first volume. It is this early section which lays the groundwork of Barth's theory of revelation. Therefore with all the difficulties, either later modifications or internal confusions,

it is necessary to examine it with care for the double purpose of discovering Barth's idea of the Word of God and of determining his ability or inability to avoid skepticism.

The Word of God as Preached

The three forms of the Word of God are the Word of God as preached, the written Word of God, and the revealed Word of God. The first of these three divisions is the most obscure and the one most poorly designed to meet skepticism. Here, if anywhere, one may complain of immature views. In fact, since it does not control the main result, an impatient reader may be permitted to skip its analysis. Yet it has some value for one who wishes to be more thorough.

Barth begins by searching for the presuppositions that make proclamation proclamation, and the Church the Church. There are acts, presumably sermons preached, which claim to be proclamation. These, or some of them at least, must become proclamation, and in this event the Church must become the Church. What Barth implies is that sermons are not always proclamation and the Church is not always the Church—statements with which an orthodox theologian would not wish to disagree, though his reasons would be very different.

"Proclamation and the Church are also simply and visibly there . . . But as what they claim to be and should be, as theologically relevant entities, as realities of revelation and faith, they are not simply and visibly there, but as such they have from time to time to come into existence" (I 1, p. 98).

This connection between sermons, the Church, and the Lord's Supper is one that Barth insists upon. "What holds of proclamation and the Church in general, cannot be better represented than precisely by the sacrament." He appeals to Calvin, who speaks of the tree in Eden and Noah's rainbow as sacraments. "Not that the tree would actually communicate immortality to them . . . or that the rainbow would have any efficacy in restraining the waters . . . but because they had a mark impressed upon them by the Word of God, constituting them signs and seals of his covenants. The tree and the rainbow both existed before: but when they were inscribed with the word of God, they were endued with a new form, so that they began to be what they were not before" (*Inst.* IV 14, 18).

Of course it is not Calvin who draws the parallel between the sermon and the sacrament. Nor does Barth offer any good reason for this parallel, other than that it is a part of his view of the Word of God. Otherwise the comparison seems strange. The rainbow and the sermon do not fit well together. God can take the rainbow, which existed before, and tell Noah to remember his promise every time he sees it. God could have as easily and as appropriately chosen the dove and the olive leaf. But can God, with all his omnipotence, take the harangues of Feuerbach and Marx and make them his Word, his Gospel, the message of salvation? How could the Communist Manifesto have a mark impressed upon it by the Word of God, so that from time to time it could become true Church proclamation? Or, rather, what sort of thing would the Word of God be, if it could do this? What does Barth mean by this Word of God?

The immediate attempt to describe the Word of God is made by specifying four connections between it and proclamation, the four being related as concentric circles: 1. "The Word of God is the commission upon the givenness of which proclamation must rest"; 2. "The Word of God is the object which as such must be given to proclamation"; 3. "The Word of God is the judgment in virtue of which proclamation can alone become real proclamation"; and 4. "Finally the Word of God . . . is the event itself in which proclamation becomes real proclamation."

Under the first of these four, the commission on which proclamation rests, Barth sets aside orders of value and real relations immanent in things, such as those which interest secular science. Set aside also are personal convictions. Of course proclamation deals with real relations and personal convictions, but only at God's positive behest. As Luther said, "Therefore we must learn to base our blessedness soundly upon the power of God and not upon our device or opinion" (I 1, p. 101).

The main assertion of the paragraph deserves praise. Consistent with the attack on modernism it sets aside mere human opinions derived by secular methods and appeals to a supernatural behest of God. But by reason of its brevity it leaves some questions unanswered. Therefore, not so much in criticism as in preparation for further search, one would like to ask about the nature and contents of the behest. In particular, does the command to preach give the preacher the substance of the message? Does it give him the entire substance?

On these pages Barth speaks mainly about the preacher's motivation, and what he says is good; but from the viewpoint of the present study and its interest in skepticism the content of the message is the important point. In the little excursus where Barth quotes Luther there is a mention of Holy Writ. Will Barth later equate the message with the Scripture?

A preliminary answer comes immediately. Proceeding from the first to the second and smaller circle, we find that the Word of God is the object which must be given to proclamation. Proclamation must be proclamation about something, a relevant assertion of a real object. Objects in so far as they are merely objects of human apprehension and thought do not need to be proclaimed. Scientific and political statement would suffice. Of course the object of proclamation must be an object of human perception, an object of experience and thought. But by designating it as the Word of God we mean that it is not primarily an object of perception. In fact, "so far as it is really proclaimed, it completely ceases to be an object of human perception . . . certainly [it presents itself] in the inevitable medium of perceptual objectivity, but in this medium as the object which we can in no wise get hold of, to which we can never point back as to something given . . . Real proclamation thus means God's Word preached and God's Word preached means, in this second circle, man's language about God on the basis of God's self-objectification which is neither present nor predictable nor relatable to any design, but is real solely in the freedom of his grace, in virtue of which from time to time he wills to be the object of this language" (*ibid.*, pp. 102-103).

That Barth boldly faces the problem of the message is gratifying. Of course, nothing else would be expected from one of his stature. Now, although this paragraph is only preliminary, there are two points that need discussion. First is the precise sense of the paragraph and second there is its relation to the previous paragraph. As to the precise meaning of this preliminary statement about the message of proclamation let us begin with the last sentence. Real proclamation is human language about God on the basis of God's self-objectification. The concept of God's self-objectification is obscure. Does it mean the incarnation of Christ? If so, one must ask how the incarnation can supply the contents of the preacher's sermon. Or does it mean a verbal message that God gave the prophets and the apostles? This, of course, obviously solves the problem of the contents of the message. But both

of these meanings are apparently ruled out by Barth's denial that we can point back to the object of proclamation as something given. Further, while this self-objectification may not be predictable by purely human foresight, Barth also says that it is not present. But if God's self-objectification is not present in the proclamation, how can the sermon become the Word of God by being based on it? Later Barth will have something to say about an event which is not present in the sermon; and it may be possible to agree with Barth that there is such an event; but one must wait to see whether such an event can supply the contents of the message and make it the Word of God. Finally, to say that this self-objectification, whatever it may be, is unrelated to any design would be to deny that God acts purposefully. Surely this is not what Barth means. Perhaps he means that God's self-objectification is unrelated to any human purpose. He must mean this. Yet can it be true? If the event in question, not so far identified, is what an orthodox Protestant would call regeneration, it is not unrelated to human purposes. The preacher preaches his sermon in the hope that God will apply its message to the heart of the unbeliever. This is a relationship, and Barth's paragraph remains perplexing.

Next, how this second circle is included within the first is a geometrical puzzle. The outer circle was the commission upon the givenness of which proclamation must rest. The inner circle is the object which must be given to proclamation. Now, if the object given to proclamation is the message, and if the commission is also the message, their relationship is clear; but in this case they would be coextensive circles, not one inner and one outer. If, however, we preserve Barth's inner and outer, are we to think that all objects of proclamation are objects of behest, but not all behests are objects of proclamation? The question is difficult to answer because Barth has specified neither the behest nor the object of proclamation. The circle involved is the circularity of the paragraph itself. Ostensibly it aims at a closer definition of the Word of God as preached. This Word is an object. But then Barth bends around and designates the object as the Word of God, and the reader misses the definition. The confusion deepens in the discussion of the objects of human perception. On the one hand the object of proclamation must be an object of perception, for "if we did not have it in this way, we would not have it at all." Yet once we proclaim it, "it completely ceases to be an object of human perception." We can never point back to it as something given. Yet, if this

second circle is included in the first, and the first was the circle of givenness, then everything in the smaller circle would have to be given too.

A final remark about this second circle concerns the object of proclamation: the object which must be given "to" —or in?—proclamation. Some of the criticism above assumed that this object was the message preached, because the criticism is interested in determining the contents of the message. But Barth in the last sentence of his paragraph identifies the object as God himself. "He wills to be the object of this language." Thus it is God himself who is given "to" proclamation, and if "he wills to be the object," then it follows that the Word of God is God. Now, in one sense this is true: Christ the Logos is God. But can we say that the sermon is God? And yet it was the Word as preached that we were seeking to define. No doubt real proclamation differs from spurious because God is present in it, even though Barth denies that God can be present. But still this does not tell us how to determine whether or not God is present in a sermon. Then aside from the puzzle that Barth makes this object, God, the object of outer as well as of inner perception, how God can be an object of perception before proclamation and completely cease to be such during proclamation is too mysterious to reassure anyone who wishes to defend Barth against the charge of skepticism.

Now, third, "the Word of God is the judgment in virtue of which proclamation can alone become real proclamation." Here Barth notes that "the proclaimer must submit to the questions, What do you know of the thing you speak of? and, What interest do you represent? . . . Only that, as proclamation, it is not touched by precisely all judgments thus brought to bear" (*ibid.*, p. 103).—Does Barth mean that as proclamation it is not touched by *any* judgments thus brought to bear?—"But then it is its scientific or moral and political or aesthetic character that is here being judged. Proclamation as such . . . presupposes that neither the nature of the object nor the situation or desire of the speaker are or can become so clear to any man as to put him in the position of making a judgment as to its truth." Any judgment of proclamation as such must be formed from a fundamentally different point of view, and that is the reason for calling proclamation the Word of God. There may be other criteria also, but even when we use them "we cannot but recollect that one criterion different from these others has given itself to our knowledge without it having been

known to any one . . . the Word of God." This is God's own judgment and this makes man's language about God true language, rightly demanding obedience.

In raising the question of the truth of proclamation Barth had the opportunity to come out clearly against skepticism. That he did not do so may be explained by the reasonable supposition that he is so unconscious of being a skeptic that the need of a defense did not occur to him. Yet, even so, it seems strange that he should set aside questions as to the scientific and moral truth of proclamation, as if they were of minor importance. Since on other points he often says "also," e.g., the object of proclamation is not merely an object of perception, though it is this also, he might here have said that the ultimacy of God's judgment does not remove the necessity of maintaining the scientific, historical, and moral truth of sermon language. Can the statement, David was the Pharaoh of 2000 B.C., be real proclamation? Can the command, Thou shalt commit adultery, be God's Word? Yet Barth says that the nature of the object proclaimed can never be so clear as to allow a man to judge of its truth. If so, why should one preach this rather than that? Can we select the material of our sermons on the basis of a different criterion "without it having been known to anyone"? How can one use an unknown criterion? Furthermore, in this paragraph, we have the same circularity as before. Ostensibly the aim is to define the Word of God more closely. Therefore it is called a judgment. Then the judgment is designated as the Word of God. This is tautological. There is also the same geometrical puzzle of explaining how this judgment of God is included in the wider circle of objects and the still wider circle of commission or behest. If all of God's judgments are in view, the third circle would be larger than the first; but if only a judgment relative to proclamation is intended, the third circle would seem to be, not narrower, but coextensive with the others.

The fourth point, "Finally, the Word of God—and here at last we utter the decisive word—is the event itself, in which proclamation becomes real proclamation" (*ibid.*, p. 104). From the other three points by themselves "the realization of proclamation might be regarded as a merely external, accidental characteristic . . . exclusively the event of the will and execution of the man proclaiming." This would be a "nominalistic" misunderstanding, yet one that cannot be eradicated unambiguously or finally. "It is the miracle of revelation and of faith

when this misunderstanding does not recur every now and then, when therefore proclamation to us is not a human volition and execution qualified in some way, but also and primarily and decisively God's own act . . . 'Not only—but also and primarily and decisively,' so the formula must run. . . . As Christ became true man and also remains true man to all eternity, so real proclamation becomes an event on the level of all other human events . . . But as Christ is not only true man, it is not only the volition and execution of the man proclaiming . . . God and the human element are not two factors operating side by side and together. The human element is a thing created by God" and God controls.

Now, this last sentence is very good. Those who emphasize the sovereignty of God will insist that God and man are not on a level. God controls. But we are interested in God's control over the language of proclamation. A sermon can be both God's Word and man's words. "Not only, but also" is the formula. Unfortunately, this fourth point no more than the other three explains the relationship between proclamation and the Word of God. Barth says that the decisive word in this relationship is the event in which proclamation becomes real proclamation. What event? What is the event by which a man can distinguish real proclamation from a sermon whose claim to be proclamation is unwarranted? To speak of God's control over human volition is excellent for some purposes, but it is of no great help here in defining the Word of God as preached. Even if all that Barth writes here be true, he still leaves us unable to distinguish between real proclamation, and a spurious sermon. He has given us the confusing circularity of concentric circles; he stresses a poorly defined "event," a judgment unknown to everybody, an object of perception that ceases to be such, and a commission whose terms remain indistinct. Would it not have been better to define the Word of God as the Holy Scripture, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments? Then proclamation could be distinguished as real proclamation by its measure of agreement with Holy Writ.

Excursus. Admirers of Barth may think that this sharp criticism is based on a misunderstanding. Instead of trying to find an event present in proclamation or a self-objectification in the incarnation, they may wish to distinguish between spurious and real proclamation on the basis of encounter or confrontation. Real proclamation is that which takes effect existentially in the hearer. Thus these paragraphs would be interpreted as

Barth's version of the Reformer's doctrine of the outer and inner hearing of the Word. Two unbelievers hear the same sermon; but in one of them something happens. This interpretation would justify Barth's remark that the event is not predictable by human foresight; it would also explain the strange statement that the self-objectification of God is not present in the proclamation. It would be present in the hearer, not in the sermon. And this interpretation might also remove the force of some of the incidental criticisms. But Barth's phraseology does not easily lend itself to this interpretation. The title of the section is *The Word of God as Preached*. Now, admittedly Barth has a place for an encounter or confrontation, and the title does not of itself rule out the possibility that a subjective event distinguishes true preaching from spurious; nevertheless the title directs our attention to the preaching. Barth's discussion confirms the title's impression. Commission, behest, and language are frequently mentioned. The unbeliever does not seem to be in the picture. Particularly under the fourth point, where the "event" comes into view, it is the language of the preacher that bulks large. The human volition referred to is that of the preacher, not that of the hearer; e.g., "The miracle of real proclamation does not consist in the volition and execution of the man proclaiming . . . ;" and the contrast is not between the preacher and the unbeliever, but between the preacher and God. There follows a long excursus (pp. 106-111) in which Barth quotes extensively from Luther, as he often does, but the subject matter is the Scripture, the message, the preaching, and perhaps the preacher himself, but not the unbeliever.¹ Therefore the suggested interpretation of the entire passage, designed to rescue Barth from these criticisms, does not seem to accord with Barth's wording. Furthermore, even if this interpretation were correct and should therefore remove the force of some incidental criticism, the main point remains untouched. The main point is the message and how it is determined. An unbeliever's conversion cannot fix its contents. Nor, if God has really given a message, would the non-occurrence of conversion change its terms. The wedding invitation is the same, no matter who accepts or who has other business. Perhaps in a purely verbal or semantic way proclamation can be called real only when conversions occur, but bringing them both under the title of the Word of God, obscuring the easily recognized distinction between a spiritual rebirth and a sermon, and switching from one to the other in the course of defining the Word of God can lead only to confusion.

It must be confessed that there are two directions from which one may approach Barth. If one comes to Barth from the position of liberalism—and this is how Barth himself developed his theology—he seems to have made a brilliant rediscovery of the Reformation. But if one comes to Barth with a mind full of Charles Hodge, the Westminster Confession, and John Calvin, that is, if one evaluates Barth from the standpoint of Reformed theology, he seems to have generated some insoluble problems by having missed the clear distinctions of the Reformers.

¹ Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict* (tr. by Eric H. Wahlstrom) p. 26, note 6, asserts "The positions of Barth and Luther are incompatible."

The Written Word of God

However, proclamation is not the crux of the matter. More important is the Word of God as written, and this is Barth's next subdivision. Instead of commencing directly with a theory of Scripture, Barth first speaks of a recollection of revelation. This enables him to distinguish Scripture from some possible anamnesis of God's truth immanent in the Church. Neither Platonic Augustinianism (*Nimirum habemus eam nescio quomodo*) nor Cartesianism (*ex nobis ideam Dei formare possimus*) are to be admitted. God might have arranged things this way, but he didn't. God did not leave the Church alone, to seek the Word of God in the hidden depths of her own existence. Christ's superiority to the Church "is concretely expressed in the fact that over against proclamation in the Church there stands an entity extremely like it as a phenomenon, temporal like it, yet different from it, and in order superior to it. This entity is Holy Scripture" (*ibid.*, p. 113). Simply by being there and telling us what God's past revelation actually is, Holy Scripture is the canon.

A canon is a footrule, a regulation, or a pattern. In the Church the canon is the rule or norm of faith. To be specific the Canon is Holy Scripture, the books of the Bible recognized by the Church as authoritative because apostolic. "By recognizing the existence of a canon the Church declares that . . . real proclamation as an event must come from another source, from without, and concretely from without, in the complete externality of her concrete canon—as an imperative, categorical yet utterly historical, becoming articulate in time. And by acknowledging that this canon is actually identical with the Bible . . . she declares that this connection of her proclamation with something concrete . . . is an order received, an obligation imposed, that this bit of past happening composed of definite texts is her directions for work, her marching orders, with which not only her preaching but she herself stands or falls, which therefore cannot under any circumstances, even hypothetically, be thought away . . . unless we mean to think away proclamation and the Church herself" (*ibid.*, p. 114).

Although the contents of these lines are said to be what the Church declares, and as traditional doctrine might not represent Barth's own view, yet the construction of the argument as a whole and the last phrase quoted, "unless we mean to think away . . . the Church her-

self," seem to require us to take the whole as Barth's view also. It is a strong assertion of Biblical authority, and because the Bible is verbally concrete, intelligible, and definite, one might hope to find here the beginning of a line of thought that would forever banish skepticism. Barth says that the canon is *identical* with the Bible; the Bible is a categorical imperative, the Church's marching orders, essential to her proclamation and very existence. If this is so, if the Bible is identical with the canon, all parts of the Bible, like all marching orders be they extensive or tiny, momentous or routine, should be equally authoritative; and since the Bible is "composed of *definite* texts" which are the Church's "directions for work," it is easy to see here the implication of verbal inspiration and infallibility. But Barth by no means draws this implication. Can he then successfully maintain the Biblical authority he has here asserted?

Barth is quite clear on the point that Scripture is superior to proclamation. He speaks of "the purely constitutive significance of the former for the latter, the restrictedness of the reality of proclamation today by its foundation upon Holy Scripture . . . therefore the fundamental distinction of the written word of the prophets and apostles above all other human words spoken later in the Church" (*ibid.*, p. 115). The words "constitutive" and "restrictedness" naturally suggest that the weekly sermon ought to be constituted out of and restricted to what is written in the Bible. This presumably is the command of God. Unconscious of any need to utilize this material in the refutation of skepticism, Barth is deeply interested in refuting Roman Catholicism. In opposition to an apostolic succession dependent on a legalistic imposition of hands or on the fact that an organization's central sanctuary guards the alleged grave of the apostle Peter, he measures the apostolicity of the Church by its faithfulness to Scripture. "The apostolic succession of the Church must mean that she is guided by the canon . . . as by the necessary rule of all expression in the Church . . . in such a way that . . . the proclamation of the Church . . . is measured by it, only therefore takes its place because and so far as it conforms to it." Once again, if the Bible is the *necessary* rule of *all* expression, and true proclamation can take place *only* in so far as it conforms to the Bible, would it not seem that the Bible must be verbally and infallibly inspired? Any contrary meaning is difficult to obtain from these strong assertions. And Barth continues to defend the written Word against all theories of unwritten tradition. He opposes

Papias who put the "living" voice of his contemporaries above the "dead" documents. To Lessing's supposition that everything written by the apostles could be lost and yet their religion persist, Barth sharply asks "Really"?

The Scripture therefore is not the Church talking to itself; it is a talking to the Church, a criterion, a canon. The danger of turning exposition into imposition, exegesis into eisegesis, is not avoided by establishing Church councils to make a decisive verdict, nor by reliance on the verdict of historical criticism comporting itself with equal infallibility. Both of these devices aim to control the Bible; the Bible should be left free to control them. " 'Inward truth . . . is a wax nose that any knave can mold as he will to suit his own face'; and if counter-Reformation polemics did apply the same tasteful metaphor to the Bible (*Scriptura est tanquam nasus cereus*) . . . that merely proves to us the rightness of demanding free exegesis for the sake of a free Bible."

"It now only remains for us to say the final word . . . That the Church is called, empowered, and guided to her proclamation by Holy Scripture . . . involves the assertion that Holy Scripture too is the Word of God. And exactly in the same sense in which we made this assertion about the event of real proclamation." Now, if Barth had made clear in what sense proclamation is the Word of God, this final paragraph would have been helpful. But here as before he insists that "The recollection of God's past revelation, the discovery of the canon . . . and therefore the existence of a real apostolic succession—all that is an event and can only be understood as an event" (*ibid.*, p. 122). But why this insistence on an event? Caesar's conquest of Gaul was an event too. Let also the discovery of the canon be an event "also"; this would not be the important point. Further, it is not the discovery of the canon that interests us; it is the canon itself, the Bible, a definite intelligible text, a criterion of preaching, the marching orders of the Church. You and I may be saved from skepticism and from sin by our discovery of the Bible; but the saving power is not in our discovery as an event. To say therefore that "In this event the Bible is the Word of God" is a dangerous subjectivizing, suggesting that the Bible is not the Word of God unless we discover it. Is a vein of silver or uranium ore less so because it has not been discovered? How could discovery change to silver what is not silver. There is in the passage a certain amount of shifting between an ob-

jective and a subjective point of view, and this is confusing. "In this word," continues Barth, the human word of prophets and apostles represents the Word of God himself, exactly in the way in which, in the event of real proclamation, the latter is to become the human word even of the preacher of today." Aside from the fact that the event of real proclamation was not satisfactorily explained, this statement is objective. The human word of the prophets is written in the Bible, whether we read the Bible or not. But a few sentences below this one, subjectivity reappears in that our "recollection" of God's past revelation comes to the fore. Our recollection is a matter of God's grace. "It is not in our power to achieve this recollection, certainly not in the form of our grip of the Bible; but if and because the Bible grips us, therefore because we become reminded, this recollection is achieved . . . The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be his Word, so far as God speaks through it" (*ibid.*, p. 123). Yet we cannot "abstract from God's free act . . . that man's word in the Bible is God's own Word." Then next Barth speaks quite objectively. "The statement, 'The Bible is God's Word' is . . . a statement which by venturing it in faith we allow to be true quite apart from our faith . . . do not allow to be true as a description of our experience with the Bible, but allow to be true as a description of the act of God in the Bible, whatever the experiences may be which we have. . . . The Bible therefore becomes God's Word in this event, and it is to its being in this becoming that the tiny word 'is' relates in the statement that the Bible is God's Word. It does not become God's Word because we accord it faith, but, of course, because it becomes revelation for us." This does not occur "in abstraction from the act of God, in virtue of which the Bible must from time to time become his Word to us" (*ibid.*, p. 124).

These latter statements of objectivity are to be accorded full force, and the shift from objectivity to subjectivity may be explained by the fact that the objectivity, real though it may be, is only momentary rather than permanent. The Bible *is* the Word of God, but only at certain instants; the Bible *becomes* the Word of God from time to time. Yet if these times are those when God lets the Bible speak to us, instants at which the Bible grips us, it is difficult to see how "the Bible is God's Word" can be true quite independently of "whatever the experiences may be which we have or do not have in that connection." In unbelief the Bible certainly does not *become* the Word of

God, and therefore it is not the Word of God. Some subjectivity seems still to remain. Furthermore, not only is the Bible's becoming and existence as the Word of God confined to certain instants, even in these instants the Bible as a whole is not the Word of God, but only those parts of it which God lets be his Word. Maybe not even these parts *are* the Word of God, for Barth had just previously said that the human word of the prophets and apostles—and these human words *are* the Bible—merely “represent” the Word of God. Now, rationality requires that each Scriptural statement be true permanently or untrue permanently. Ambiguous sentences, such as the favorite Stoic example “It is daytime now,” can change from true to false as the meaning of “now” is changed. But if unambiguous sentences can become true and then become false, if they are true only from time to time, there is no defense against skepticism. On this score Old-Protestantism was more secure than Barth is.

In the excursus which closes this subdivision Barth expresses his disagreement with the orthodox position, particularly with certain Lutheran ideas. In opposition to Calvinism the Lutherans spoke of “the *efficacia Verbi divini etiam ante et extra usum*, to the effect that a divine power belongs to the Word of God proclaimed and written whatever its effect upon the bearer or reader might be.” To the extent that this formula makes the Bible the Word of God independently of subjective experience, Barth admits the claim—with what consistency we have already suggested. But there is more to the doctrine than this, and Barth objects to this more. Quenstedt had specifically denied that the Bible requires a new operation or impulse (*novo motu et elevatione nova*) for a new effect, other than its own natural power of production. The Bible is a medium in which the highest power and efficacy are permanently inherent. Hollaz compares the Bible with the sun, which radiates heat even behind clouds, and with a seed that retains its living power even in barren soil. The Word of God, he says is not an *actio* (a Barthian event?) but a *vis*, a *potentia*, which as such has *efficacia* even *extra usum*.

Now, if and insofar as these Lutheran phrases deny the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as he applies the Word in the heart and mind of the believer, they can be regarded as different from and inferior to Calvinism. But it is not any distinction between the two forms of the Reformation that is important here. So far as the actual words quoted are concerned, they are as Calvinistic as they are

Lutheran. And Barth's criticism, too, applies to the common core of Reformation doctrine, not just to Lutheranism.

First Barth criticizes the illustration of the seed and the sun. He deprecates making a physical cause analogous to a hyperphysical force. "As if apart from the theological criterion of truth and reality, the analogy with the physical had to exist or needed to exist!" Undoubtedly it should be granted that illustrations seldom illustrate; but it was not made clear that Hollaz asserted the necessity of this analogy in order for seeds to exist. Even if he did, an objection to an unfortunate illustration does not touch the main point. Then Barth continues, "A power comparable with sunshine . . . does not require a *nova elevatio*. It is there just as the powers in nature are there. But is God's Word there in that way? If it is really the Word? And if it is the Word of God who is a Person? We shall surely have to choose between the concepts 'Word of God' and '*vis hyperphysica*,' and in Evangelical theology no doubt should really be possible as to how we must choose here" (*ibid.*, p. 124).

Presumably *vis hyperphysica* carries an evil connotation, in which case no one could wish to apply such a derogatory phrase to the Bible. But what is the power of truth, if not hyperphysical? Why cannot this power inhere in the Bible as truly as the powers of nature are where they are? Barth asks, "Is God's Word there in that way?" Why not? Barth asks again, "If it is really the Word?" And Hollaz replies, Most assuredly, that is why the Bible is the Word of God. If God is a Person? asks Barth. But how can the personality of God be inconsistent with the power of his word? In Evangelical theology, concludes Barth, no doubt should really be possible as to how we must choose here. No doubt at all, replies Hollaz as he chooses the Bible, if one is really Evangelical.

The difference between the Evangelical position and Barth's "Neo-orthodoxy" and the key to what may seem a confusing dialogue between Barth and Hollaz is that orthodox Protestantism equates the Word of God with the Bible. For all of Barth's attempts to make it appear that the Bible is the Word of God, this equation does not hold in his thinking. Behind proclamation and behind the Bible there is something else that is the Word of God, an event of revelation, and only in this event does the Bible become the Word of God, and only partially at that. To get to the bottom of Barth's theory therefore it is necessary to discover and define revelation.

The Revealed Word of God

Let us first recapitulate and then take the next step forward. According to Barth there are three forms of the Word of God. The first two are Church proclamation and the Bible. These two are not really the Word of God, but they become the Word at certain times upon the occurrence of an event. What then is the third form of the Word of God which really and at all times is the Word of God, and in virtue of which the other two sometimes become the Word of God: This subsection of eleven pages bears the heading, *The Revealed Word of God*.

"The Bible is the concrete medium by which the Church recalls God's revelation in the past, is called to expect revelation in the future . . . The Bible is therefore not itself and in itself God's past revelation, just as Church proclamation also is not itself and in itself the expected future revelation. But the Bible speaking to us and heard by us as God's Word attests the past revelation" (*ibid.*, pp. 124-125). Barth emphasizes the idea of attestation. By attesting revelation the Bible "is" the Word of God, and also conversely by becoming God's Word it attests and is God's past revelation in the form of attestation. "To attest means to point in a definite direction beyond oneself to something else." This makes it perfectly clear that Barth does not regard the Bible as the Word of God. He has in mind "something else." In the very next line he says that "the witness [of the Bible] answers for the truth of this something else." Now, we may admit that "Biblical witnesses point beyond themselves." The subject matter of the Gospel is not Paul himself. But the Biblical "witness," the assertions of the apostles, need not point beyond themselves. If God gave Paul certain pieces of information (Barth does not shy away from the word "information"), and if Paul wrote these truths accurately, what he wrote and what God said would be identical. This suggestion, however, is not what Barth means, although he beclouds the issue by swerving from "attestation" through the ambiguity of "witness," in the singular, to personal "witnesses," the apostles in the plural. "It is not themselves, and not, emphatically not, their own special experience of and relationship to God that they wish to present to and urge upon the Church, but that something else" (*ibid.*, p. 126). The ambiguity of the term witness and the emphatic "not's"

arise from the fact that Barth has modernism in mind more than Evangelicalism. He wishes to distinguish between a prophet and a genius, between an externally given Gospel and an analysis of inner experience. So far so good; but what of the truths of revelation? Does revelation communicate accurate information? What is revealed? Barth does not altogether forget this phase of the matter.

Not only do the Biblical witnesses, plural, or a Biblical witness, masculine, claim no authority for themselves, but the Biblical witness itself (neuter) claims no authority, according to Barth. That "Something Else" is the authority. "Therefore we do the Bible a poor honor, and one unwelcome to itself, when we directly identify it with this something else, with revelation itself . . . We should not in practice forget that the historicist conception of the Bible with its cult of heroes and the mechanical doctrine of verbal inspiration are products of the same age and the same spirit. They have this in common, that they stood for the means by which man at the Renaissance claimed to control the Bible and so set up barriers against its control over him, which is its perquisite" (*ibid.*, pp. 126-127).

Here a question arises as to the factuality of Barth's representation. In the first place there are well-known exegetes who would deny that the honor mentioned is one unwelcome to the Bible itself. Not to mention orthodox commentators, it may be remembered that Brunner¹ in his earlier books asserted that verbal inspiration was a doctrine invented a century or so after the Reformation. Later he admitted that Calvin and Melancthon held it, and then even Luther. Retracting his earlier position he finally traced "the false identification" of the Word of God with the words of the Bible to II Timothy 3:16 and even further back into the Old Testament. The doctrine of verbal inspiration therefore, divested of the pejorative adjective me-

¹"Es ist freilich nicht zu leugnen, dass auch bei den Reformatoren selbst, sogar bei Luther, der unter ihnen das neue Schriftprinzip am klärsten und kühnsten entwickelt hatte, neben ihrer neuen auch die traditionelle, formalautoritäre oder axiomatische Schriftauffassung einherging, dass das Neue noch nicht völlig zum Durchbruch kam und sie so der Rückkehr zur alten Anschauung, ohne es zu wollen, Vorschub leisteten. So war es denn erst die durch die kritische Bibelwissenschaft und durch das neue wissenschaftliche Weltbild geschaffene Krise des Bibelglaubens, die die Theologie nötigte, sich auf Luthers revolutionäre Erkenntnis zurückzubessern und sie aus der Verbindung mit der traditionellen Inspirationslehre herauszulösen. Das ist vor allem durch die biblizistischen Dogmatiker des letzten Jahrhunderts, Kähler und Schlatter, geschehen." Emil Brunner, *Die christliche Lehre von Gott*, p. 117. Zurich, Zwingli-Verlag.

Cf. also the carefully documented chapter, *Calvin and the Holy Scriptures*, by Kenneth S. Kantzer, in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, edited by John W. Walvoord, (Eerdmans, 1957).

chanical, is not an invention of the Renaissance; nor does it stand in any theological connection with a cult of heroes, Carlyle's cult or one of an earlier age. Even Barth himself in another place (I 1, p. 516) admits that verbal inspiration, far from being a Renaissance invention, was the teaching of Paul. Then, second, in addition to these questions of history, there is the logical problem of explaining how the doctrine of verbal inspiration allows man to control the Bible rather than the Bible to control man. Was it not by a study of the Bible that Luther, Calvin, and Knox came to alter their customary behavior? They became convinced that indulgences, images, feast days including Christmas, and many traditional rites were either contrary to or beside the "marching orders" of the Church. In their change of customs and conduct the Bible controlled them, not *vice versa*.

If, however, the words of the Bible are not revelation, what is the latter? Can it be a communication of truth? Can it be objective? Can it save Barth from skepticism? The suspicion that Barth does not escape subjectivism is reinforced rather than allayed by his explanations. "Direct identification of revelation and the Bible . . . takes place as an event . . . when and where the word of the Bible functions as the word of a witness [apparently masculine] . . . when and where by means of its [apparently neuter] word we also succeed in seeing and hearing what he saw and heard. Therefore where the Word of God is an event, revelation and the Bible are one in fact, and word for word at that" (*ibid.*, p. 127). The subjectivity here, or the suspicion of subjectivity, attaches to the consideration that our success in hearing what the apostle heard is the condition without which the Bible cannot be the Word of God. This condition is fulfilled in discontinuous events, so that the same words are at one time the words of God and at another time they are not. Also, in the case of two people hearing them, they may at the same time both be and not be the words of God. This is not true of other words. Lincoln's Gettysburg address remains the words of Lincoln no matter who hears them or does not hear them. Why should God's words be different in this respect? This question why is all the more pertinent since Barth allows the Bible to be identified, in the event of course, with revelation, "and word for word at that." This phrase would seem to provide sufficient objectivity. It is the words of the Bible, not the words of your or my invention, that are the words of God. But if so, why cannot they always have been and always remain so? The words themselves do not change. Can the fact that God spoke them to the apostle change?

Barth makes an effort to explain this difficulty. "We should realize," he continues, "that and how far they are also always not one, how far their unity is really an event. The revelation upon which the Biblical witnesses gaze . . . is, purely formally, different from the word of the witnesses just in the way in which an event itself is different from the best and most faithful narrative about it. But this difference is considerable compared with the one which beggars all analogy, that in revelation we are concerned with Jesus Christ . . . Literally we are therefore concerned with the singular Word spoken, and this time really directly, by God himself. But in the Bible we are invariably concerned with human attempts to repeat and reproduce, in human thoughts and expressions, this Word of God in definite human situations, e.g., in respect of the complications of Israel's political position midway between Egypt and Babylon, or of the errors and confusions in the Christian Church at Corinth between A.D. 50-60. In the one case *Deus dixit*, in the other *Paulus dixit*. These are two different things" (*ibid.*, p. 127).

It is perfectly clear from this passage that for Barth revelation cannot be simply identified with the Bible; but how precisely they are related is not equally clear. The first difficulty is introduced by the substitution of the word *gaze* for the earlier reference to hearing. The object gazed upon is apparently Jesus of Nazareth, whose existence can doubtless be termed an event. This event, however, is a different event from the one so far under discussion. Barth had been talking of an event in which the words of the Bible become the words of God for us, and therefore of an event or series of events continually repeated. But the incarnation of Christ happened once for all. Now, this substitution of one event for another leads to confusion. The historical existence or event of Jesus Christ is indeed different from any narrative of it. Jesus Christ is the singular Word, spoken by God directly at a date in history. But it is hardly true that the Bible consists of human attempts to repeat the Incarnation, especially in the time when Israel's political position between Egypt and Babylon was a matter of importance. But if we are interested not simply in the mere physical existence of Jesus as an historical surd, if we are mainly interested in what he said and in the intelligible explanation of his actions, *Paulus dixit* and *Deus dixit* are not two different things. They are not materially different, if the sentences are identical; nor are they even formally different, if God speaks through Paul. The Bible is neither merely nor mainly a narrative, which of course must be formally dif-

ferent from the events narrated. Historical events are essential to the Bible, but only as interpreted and explained. The bare existence of a man Jesus means nothing. Rational religion requires attention to what he said and must find an explanation of what he did. If he remains dumb and no one explains his actions, gazing upon him will be of no value. And if the explanation is incorrect and his words false, the value can only be negative.

It may be that Barth can derive some aid and comfort from the vague phrases of Augustine and Anselm, to which he refers in the excursus here. But his appeal to Calvin is beside the point. Calvin does not in the least separate the Bible from the Word of God, uniting them only in sporadic events; nor does he limit the truth or the authority of the Bible to subjective conditions. Barth's first reference (*Institutes* I vii 2) does not precisely apply to the authority of Scripture as such, but to a Christian's belief in that authority. Calvin's proviso, which Barth's argument requires to be the condition upon which the Bible becomes God's Word, viz., "when they are satisfied of its divine origin" is a proviso for the Bible's being accepted as authoritative. The second reference also (I vii 4) serves Barth's purpose no better. Calvin begins by insisting that God is the author of the Bible. Then come the words Barth quotes: "The principal proof therefore of the Scriptures is everywhere derived from the character of the Divine Speaker." Then Calvin continues by insisting that the prophets did not invent the message out of their own genius, "but bring forward the sacred name of God to compel the submission of the whole world." He continues to speak of God as "the author of the Law, the prophecies, and the Gospel." To be sure, "the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit. It is necessary therefore that the same Spirit, who spake by the mouths of the prophets, should penetrate our hearts, to convince us that they faithfully delivered the oracles which were divinely entrusted to them." Calvin's main concern here is the subjective conviction of a believer by the Holy Spirit. But objectively, what we are convinced of is the oracles which the prophets faithfully delivered. Calvin gives no hint that these oracles, the text of the Scripture, is anything other than the permanent Word of God. For this reason it is necessary to disagree with Barth's last sentence in the excursus: "And in the sense and frequently in the vocabulary of this very distinction there are set up . . . as early as the extreme orthodoxy alike

of Reformers and of Lutherans . . . reflections on revelation itself to be distinguished from Scripture because constituting the first basis of it as inspired Scripture." Though Protestants generally have distinguished between general and special revelation, we simply cannot agree that the distinction Barth makes is found in Calvin, Turretin, Quenstedt, and Hollaz.

Since these pages are Barth's main attempt to explain the relationship between revelation and the Scriptures, they must be examined with detailed care. Yet involvement in detail should not obscure the purpose of the passage. From this examination we wish to understand what Barth means by a "revelation" that is something else than the Scriptures. Is it the historic appearance of Jesus Christ in Palestine? Is it the act of God by which he inspired the prophets? Could it be something which happens to Christians today? So far, with the exception that revelation is not the Scriptures, no clearly defined view has been found.

The next lines seem to identify revelation with God's act of inspiring the prophets. "Revelation engenders the Scripture which attests it, as the commission, the 'burden' laid upon the prophets and apostles, as the object which introduces itself personally into the scheme over against them, as the judge at once and the guarantor of the truth of their language, as the event of inspiration in which they become speakers and writers of the Word of God" (*ibid.*, p. 129). In the lines that follow Barth again speaks of this divine act as happening once for all, when the Word became flesh; so that it is not clear how revelation could be God's act in inspiring Moses some fifteen hundred years previously. But let us pay closer attention to the sentence quoted. Revelation, he says, is a commission or burden, distinct from the Scriptures as a cause is distinct from its effect. Now, a commission is a definite order; a burden may refer to some subjective uneasiness that something or other should be done. If revelation is a burden in this vague sense, it is hard to see how it could guarantee the truth of what Moses wrote; if on the other hand revelation is a commission to write these definite words, then there is no material difference between the Bible and revelation. The term inspiration is derived from II Timothy 3:16, but the translation is not too happy. B. B. Warfield pointed out that the term inspiration gives the impression that the Bible existed as a written document and that God *breathed into* it. But the Greek term does not mean *breathed into*, but *breathed out*:

God breathed out the Scriptures. This then identifies revelation with the words of the Writings. On this ground, and hardly on any other, could the truth of their language be guaranteed. There may be a sense in which the prophets were inspired of God; Peter says that holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; but the doctrine of inspiration is not a doctrine of the inspiration of the prophets; it is a doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. On the orthodox doctrine therefore, on the Scriptural account of Scripture, one can never remove the Bible from the category of revelation.

Nor is the sentiment quoted—Revelation guarantees the truth of their language—Barth's last word. For all the vigor of this assertion it turns out that revelation does not guarantee the truth of Moses' language. Once more referring to Jesus Christ as the revelation, the *Deus dixit*, "the pure event in relation to which everything else [Columbus' discovery of America and the inspiration of Moses] is not yet an event or has ceased to be one," Barth tells us to listen to the Bible "in what is certainly always the very modest, changing, perhaps increasing, perhaps even decreasing compass in which it is true from time to time for each individual" (*ibid.*, p. 131). Now, a Christian growing in grace may and will listen to the Bible more and more carefully in ever increasing extent and depth; a backslider will decrease his compass; but the idea of sentences, propositions, verses of the Bible increasing or decreasing in truth from time to time and from individual to individual is a skeptical delusion. That revelation or inspiration or the historical appearance of Jesus does not in Barth's theory guarantee the truth of what the prophets said is still clearer in the next few lines. "The unity of revelation guarantees the unity of the Biblical witness, in spite of and within its utter multiplicity, in fact its contradictoriness."

Is it necessary to underline the logic, or rather the lack of logic, displayed here? No doubt a certain unity can exist among divergent accounts of the same events. The books of Winston Churchill, Dwight Eisenhower, and even German authors on World War II may contradict one another at certain points, without losing a basic unity. And of course this is about what Barth means. He considers the Bible to be true in the main. But this is quite different from the idea that inspiration guarantees the truth of what the prophets wrote. On this page Barth asserts that the prophets contradict themselves. But even omnipotence cannot guarantee the truth of both sides of a contradiction. It is another one of those three sided squares.

Perhaps the confusion of these eleven pages on *The Revealed Word of God* springs from two points. First, Barth does not really decide what revelation is. Several times he identifies it with the incarnation or with Jesus Christ himself: "Revelation in fact does not differ from the Person of Christ himself" (*ibid.*, p. 134). But only five lines above this one he speaks of "every state of revelation" and "every happening in which revelation takes place" as if Moses and Paul might have received revelations, for "revelation is itself the divine decision which takes effect in the Bible and in proclamation" (*ibid.*, p. 133). Yet again, "Just because it is the once-for-all given thing, they cannot reproduce it . . . And by future revelation no other is to be understood than the one which took place once for all . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 135). But how can the incarnation, once for all, not reproducible, and every happening in which revelation takes place, including something still future, be the same event?

Barth therefore is really not clear as to the identity of revelation. He has several things in mind and the account of one does not fit the others. The second point derives from his clearer negation that the Bible is not revelation. Revelation therefore must be wordless. It is some sort of event or events, but not a series of sentences. But if this is so, and if there are contradictions in the Bible, there is no method of deciding which side of the contradictions to accept. Shall we believe Churchill, Eisenhower, Montgomery, or a German author? And even if there be no contradictions in the Bible, as the orthodox maintain, how does Moses or a theologian today get from a dumb, unintelligent event, to an articulate and definite theological belief?

The Unity of the Three Forms

Barth now concludes his section on *The Word of God in its Threefold Form* with one page on *The Unity of the Word of God*, plus a four page excursus.

"We have been speaking," says Barth, "of three forms of the Word of God, not of three several Words of God. . . . It is one and the same, whether we regard it as revelation, as the Bible, or as proclamation. There is no distinction of degree or value between these three forms. For so far as proclamation really rests upon recollection of the revelation attested in the Bible and is therefore the obedient repetition of the Biblical witness, it is no less the Word of God than the Bible.

And so far as the Bible really attests revelation, it is no less the Word of God than revelation itself" (*ibid.*, pp. 135-136).

A serious difficulty inheres in the words "so far as." Can we know how far the Bible really attests revelation? Now, although, obviously, not all proclamation, not all sermons, are equally accurate repetitions of the Biblical material, it is relatively easy to judge how far they rest upon recollection of the revelation attested in the Bible; or, at least, it is relatively easy to judge which sermons are more accurate and which are less accurate summaries of the text of the Bible. But how may one judge to what degree the Bible really attests revelation? In the first case comparison is easy because the two things being compared are both verbal. But when one is verbal, the text of the Bible, and the other is a poorly defined event, an historical or perhaps psychological surd, inexpressible by nature and unintelligible, how can any comparison be made?

Barth's further explanations, shifting back from event to text, make it very difficult to see how he wants to answer this question. On the same page he tells us that the revelation itself never meets us anywhere in abstract form; it meets us only in proclamation and in Scripture. This statement by itself or taken in another context would clearly satisfy the requirements of objectivity and intelligibility. A consistent Calvinist would be willing to say that the inspiration of Moses and Jeremiah, and the incarnation of Christ as well, meets us today (even if this is not true of the disciples who saw Jesus in Palestine) only in the Scripture. Thus we would have revelation, at least special revelation, only in the verbal text. But unfortunately in spite of his last words Barth had already defined revelation, for us today, as something other than the conceptual content of Scripture. But Barth cannot have it both ways. An inexpressible historical or psychological surd is one thing; an intelligible narrative theologically explained is quite another; and this latter, this return to the verbal text, with its insistence that revelation meets us only in the Bible, raises a serious question as to whether any "something else" is possible, let alone necessary.

This criticism is by no means intended to deny the historicity of the events of the Biblical narrative. Events they were. Two things are equally essential to Christianity: certain historical events and their correct theological explanation. If Jesus did not visibly die on the cross at a definite time and place, Christianity is false; but also

Christianity is equally false if that event is not to be interpreted as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. Historical event and theological explanation are equally essential.

The emphasis in this present argument falls on the theological explanation. Not that Barth rules out the theology of the Bible. His high commendations of the Bible have already been freely acknowledged. Rather, the question concerns the consistency of Barth's construction. He has said, "The revealed Word of God we know only from Scripture . . . or from Church proclamation." This excellent assertion can be pressed further. Not only do we today know the "event" of Christ through the Scripture, but in a sense this was true of the disciples also. They did not know Christ simply by looking at him. They had read the Old Testament, and they had listened to what he said. What he said may not have been written down, it was not yet Scripture, but it was words. The incarnation, not the theological doctrine but the mere physical existence of Jesus Christ by itself, cannot be Christian revelation. Such a dumb speechless event would be useless to a Church because it could never engender, with any certainty whatever, the extensive theology of the New Testament. For the same reason Barth can never measure how far "the Bible really attests revelation." Still less can a repeated act of inspiration, as an alternate identification of "revelation," apart from the words inspired, solve the problem. But of course neither the real Christ nor the repeated acts of inspiration were actually speechless. God put words into Moses' mouth; Jesus taught, and what he did not teach, the identical *dixit* of God and Paul did. Barth's third form of the Word solves nothing; it merely creates problems, useless problems, insoluble problems.

The insoluble problem reappears many times. For example, Barth writes, "The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which makes proclamation possible, or through the proclamation made possible by the revelation." As for the second part of this disjunction, there is no need to deny that the written Word of God can be made known to a congregation through proclamation. The objectionable point, and the objection attaches to both parts of this disjunction, is the role of revelation. It is not "revelation" that makes proclamation possible; the Scripture does this. Sermons must have content, and the content must or ought to come from the Bible. Nor can anyone know the written Word of God through "revelation."

Whether revelation be identified with the historic appearance of Christ in Palestine, or with an incommunicable experience of Moses, or with some similar experience of ours today, it is not true that "the written Word of God we know only through revelation." We know the written Word of God by picking up a Bible, opening it, and reading it.

What reason can Barth have for assuming the existence of this third form of revelation? It is hazardous to peer into the unexpressed intentions of an author; yet in addition to the remaining influence of liberal higher criticism on Barth, his actual words provide some ground for supposing that a part of the motivation is the desire to find an analogy with the Trinity. "In the fact that for revelation, Scripture, and proclamation, we can substitute the divine 'Person'-names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and *vice versa*, that in the one case as in the other we shall encounter the same fundamental determinations and mutual relationships, . . . in these facts we may see a certain support for the inner necessity and rightness of the present exposition of the Word of God" (I 1, pp. 136-137).

Now, this is a most striking idea. It reminds one of the artificial arrangement of Kant's twelve categories, or the equally unsatisfactory analogies of Augustine, which Barth himself condemns, between the Trinity and human psychological functions. Note that here Barth equates revelation with the Father, Scripture with the Son, and sermons with the Holy Ghost, so that, aside from the highly imaginative origin of the analogy, it breaks the previous identification of revelation with the Son.

Barth concludes this section with a four page excursus. It is most interesting as usual. He begins by saying, "The doctrine of the three forms of the Word of God in the sketch here attempted is not new" (*ibid.*, p. 137). But the quotations he makes from Luther, Turretin, and some others show chiefly that Barth's doctrine is quite new and widely different from that of historic Protestantism. He complains that the orthodox doctrine of inspiration freezes the connection between Scripture and revelation. Why this should be objectionable if revelation never meets us except in Scripture, and in sermons that conform to Scripture, is hard to understand. His explanation is that by freezing the connection between Scripture and revelation, Protestantism forgot the living voice of God in Church proclamation. This sounds like an objection that Romanism might bring against

the Reformation; and in view of Barth's strong opposition to Romanism his present remark seems out of character. Of course, Barth is not going to charge Protestantism with a return to any papal position. Protestantism's alleged neglect of the living voice of God in the Church, presumably in distinction from the dead voice of God in the Bible, resulted, says Barth, in the Church's becoming a place of social service; and when the Church becomes a place of social service, modernism has well begun. Thus Barth remarkably makes verbal inspiration the cause of modernism! Others would have supposed that modernism is the result of a denial of verbal inspiration and of the substitution of a purely human message for the "dead" voice of God.

It is curious how Barth tries to blame old Protestantism, with its loyalty to the Bible, for the rise of modernistic unbelief. He accuses orthodoxy of minimizing Christology, which then became superfluous. "And when in due course in the nineteenth century a reaction, sound in itself, arose in the direction of a christocentric theology, first in Schleiermacher and subsequently and still more outspokenly in A. Ritschl and his school, it was too late" (I 2, p. 123). To remedy this alleged defect in orthodoxy, Barth will stress Christology, in particular the Incarnation, and John 1:14. That the eternal Word chose to assume human nature is "absolutely the sole point in which New Testament witness originates, and therefore also the sole point from which a doctrine of revelation congruous with this witness can originate. We do not look for some higher vantage point from which our statement can derive its meaning, but we start from this point itself" (I 2, p. 124). This attempt to identify orthodox Protestantism as the cause of modernism depends on an unbiblical overemphasis on the Incarnation. Let it be noted that the Bible nowhere commands the celebration of Christmas, but that the Resurrection is to be celebrated every week. At the same time Barth misreads history. Orthodoxy was Biblical. The decline into modernism is the direct outcome of rejecting the Bible and substituting human experience. Of this orthodoxy is not guilty, but contemporary theories of encounter and confrontation may be. However, let us not be so disconcerted by the unexpected twist of making verbal inspiration the cause of modernism as to forget that Barth has failed to provide an intelligible account of the unity of his three forms of the Word of God and has failed to answer the questions raised along the way.

Has God Spoken?

On his own principles, or at least on some of them, and here we pass beyond the section we have examined in such detail, Barth ought to have given an intelligible account of the Word of God, even in its basic form of revelation. Not only are proclamation and Scripture language, "But revelation itself and as such is language too. . . . We have no reason for not taking the concept 'Word of God' in its primary and literal sense. 'God's Word' means, God speaks" (I 1, p. 150). "The form in which reason communicates with reason, person with person, is language; so too when it is God's language. . . . The Word of God—we should not evade the concept so much tabued to-day—is a rational and not an irrational event" (*ibid.*, pp. 152-153). Furthermore, "Language or speaking stands in correlation to hearing, understanding, and obeying." Rudolph Otto's "Idea of the Holy," on the other hand is numinous and irrational, and therefore cannot be the Word of God. Finally, "God reveals himself in propositions by means of language and human language at that . . . Thus the personality of the Word of God is not to be played off against its verbal character" as Tillich wants to do (*ibid.*, p. 156).

All these phrases would ordinarily be understood in a sense agreeable to the orthodox Protestant doctrine of verbal inspiration. If God speaks in human language, does he not "breathe out" the very words? And in that case would not the unity of the Word of God throughout whatever forms it may have consist in the identity of these words, no matter who repeated them and no matter what effect they produced? But while such a view is easily understandable, Barth does not subscribe to it. Sandwiched in with the sentences just quoted, there are others which not only exclude verbal inspiration, but, what is extremely perplexing, they also contradict their neighbors. The resulting combination is as numinous and irrational as anything found in Rudolph Otto.

For example, Barth compares the difficulty of stating the content of God's Word with the difficulty of knowing the nature of God. "We can never by retrospect . . . fix what God is or what his Word is: He must always repeat that to us and always repeat it afresh" (I 1, p. 149). But the necessity for this is not evident. In any case, it is not consistent with the idea that God's Word is rational language.

If God speaks once, we ourselves can always repeat the proposition, and it is not necessary for God to speak it afresh.

Furthermore, Barth makes the puzzling statement, "There is no human awareness corresponding to this divine utterance" (*ibid.*, p. 149). Is it not strange that Barth should deny all awareness of God's speech, if God speaks to us in human language? Indeed, even if the inner event of which Barth speaks so frequently were not the hearing of words and propositions, but an emotional experience similar to that of Lessing's "paralytic [who] feels the beneficent shock of the electric spark" (*ibid.*, p. 166), still there would have to be some "awareness corresponding to this divine utterance."

Then, immediately upon saying that revelation is as much language as Scripture is, he adds that human propositions correspond only brokenly with the nature of the Word of God (*ibid.*, p. 150). But if God in speaking uses human language, must we conclude that God's speech corresponds only brokenly with what he is saying? In this case the free and omnipotent God would have failed to communicate his meaning, and "Thou shalt not steal" would not be precisely what God had in mind. Or, on the other hand, if omnipotence guarantees that God can express his meaning, and this is not a logical absurdity like a three-sided square; if also the phrase "human propositions" designates propositions spoken by a man, the question arises how, when a man accurately repeats the proposition, can this accurate repetition break the sense. Even when a parrot without understanding repeats "Polly wants a cracker," the proposition remains true.

When Barth replies to Tillich, he is on the side of language and intelligibility; he refuses to separate the words and the actions of Jesus Christ from his essence. The words are not the "expression" of an essence that stands behind them. "The essence of this person is identical with his language, action, and passion" (I 1, p. 156). But if so, do we not have the words of Christ directly before us? The fact that the evangelist wrote them down does not make them only indirectly present. Their content is not numinous but intelligible. And if these words are *identical* with the essence of Christ, how can Barth have concluded that the words of Scripture, when we quote them, always mean something quite different from what God said?

But if Barth defends intelligibility against Tillich, at other times he resiles. "'God's Word' means God speaks . . . God's Word is not a

thing to be described [like the Bible?] nor is it a concept to be defined [like the concept of sanctification?]. It is neither a content nor an idea. It is not 'a truth' . . . It is *the* truth because it is God's person speaking . . . It is not something objective. It is *the* objective, because it is *the* subjective, namely, God's subjective . . . It always has a perfectly definite, objective content . . . But this divine *concretissimum* can as such be neither anticipated nor repeated" (I 1, p. 155).

Once again, Barth's rhetorical language is confusing. The propositions of the Bible are *concretissima*, but obviously they can be repeated. Now, if God's Word is not these propositions, but if none the less God's Word has a definite and concrete content, everyone would like to know what it is. This only returns us to Barth's previous remark that the content of God's Word is as difficult to apprehend as the very nature of God himself. Not only difficult, but impossible. "The real content of God's speech . . . is thus never to be conceived and reproduced by us as a general truth" (I 1, p. 159). We may quote Scripture, but this is "our own work and is not to be confused with the fulness of the Word of God itself. . . . What God said was always quite different . . . from what we may say and must say to ourselves and to others about its content . . . Even the Word of Scripture, by which God speaks to us, really becomes quite different in the transition from the mouth of God himself to our ear and to our own mouth . . . Its real content remains inconceivable to us on our side" (*ibid.*, pp. 159-160).

All these expressions are nothing other than the negative theology of the impossible mystics. The quotations just made can only mean that God has not spoken, that is, has not spoken intelligibly. However much the words of the Bible are said to be pointers, they point at best to something inconceivable of which we have no awareness. Can we then avoid the conclusion that Barth proposes two incompatible types of theology? The one is positive and concrete; the other is negative theology. The one is rational; the other is irrational skepticism.

Contemporaneity

Only one hope now remains for Barth. In the light of the preceding criticism nothing looks very promising, but Barth adds a section on the concept of contemporaneity which might just possibly pre-

serve the presently endangered unity of the three forms and to some extent salvage a modicum of intelligibility by making all the "events" contemporaneous.

Barth's main motive in this section, in distinction from the material directly opposing verbal inspiration, is not so much to attack Protestant orthodoxy as it is to undermine modernism. The section was mentioned in Chapter II where Lessing's attempt to merge revelation into history was discussed. He wanted to know how men of antiquity could contribute to modern religion. The insuperable lack of contemporaneousness between Christ and ourselves disturbed him. His solution posited an immanently superable lack of contemporaneousness, which became standard for modernism. Thus modernism sought revelation in the immanent principles of the world and of human nature. This procedure puts Jesus, Paul, Luther, and even ourselves on essentially the same level. Immanent revelation is equally accessible to all men. In fact, because we come later in time, we are the superior judges. Now, in opposition to Lessing, Ritschl and Harnack, Barth wishes to preserve the superior position for the apostles. The preceding material did not clearly succeed in justifying apostolic authority. Here he carries his argument further. Doing away with our lack of contemporaneousness by placing ourselves on the same level with Christ and the apostles, in order by participation in the same prophetic spirit as them to discuss with them the net value of their words, the concept of the Word of God is humanized and might as well be eliminated (I 1, p. 167). But there is, Barth assures us, a type of contemporaneousness that takes this concept seriously and preserves the unique position of the apostles.

The Word of God, presumably in all its three forms, is God's contingently contemporaneous act. That the Word is a divine act occurring from time to time sharply distinguishes Barth's view from modernism. There is no doubt that Barth rejects immanentism. But those who wish to compare him with Protestant orthodoxy wonder what is meant by a contemporaneous act.

The explanation lies in the difference of times. One time is the time of the original revelation. Barth calls it the original utterance of God himself, though it seems here that "utterance" does not indicate any definite words that could be accurately written down in a document. This time is the time of Jesus Christ, and according to John 8:56 it was also the time of Abraham, as well as the time of that

which the apostles heard. Another time is the time of the apostles' testimony or attestation, the time of Peter, the time of the canon. Another time is the time of the Church, the time of derivative proclamation (I 1, p. 164). These three times, then, correspond to the revelation, the Scriptures, and Church proclamation. These times, Barth continues, are distinguished not only by years and centuries, but by the varied attitude of God to men. The Biblical witnesses, the apostles, though men like us, stand in a unique position in the Church. Ours is a different position. We must submit to the apostles, and both the apostles and ourselves must submit to Jesus Christ.

If by this explanation the reader expects to learn how a difference in time justifies the apostles' superiority over us and Christ's superiority over them, the sentence following is disappointing. "This varying position in God's order," he says, "distinguishes these three times in a way not otherwise characteristic of man's times, a way in which they differ only here, in which only the times of the Word of God differ" (I 1, p. 165). This is disappointing because we expected the notion of different times to justify the apostles' superior position, whereas it has turned out that the apostles' superior position, taken without justification, is used to distinguish the times.

Yet Barth continues as if he had succeeded in basing apostolic superiority on times. "If we drop the orderly variety of the three times . . . we must drop the concept of the Word of God itself . . . The Church of the present . . . in that case speaks the last word as heiress and interpretress of history and . . . stands solitary by herself and pointed in on herself. If we insist that the concept of the Word of God means precisely that the Church does not stand solitary . . . then we must abide by the orderly distinction between the times, and the contemporaneousness of present day proclamation with Scripture and with revelation can certainly not be regarded as a thing to be introduced . . . by incorporating Scripture and revelation in the life of humanity" (I 1, p. 167). The concepts of election, calling, and new birth shatter all immanentism and "assert that without the removal of the difference the time of Christ is made contemporary with the time of the prophets and apostles by the free act of God" (*ibid.*, p. 168).

Now, insofar as this argument reveals the essential humanism of liberal theology, it is an excellent statement. But does it explain the kind of contemporaneousness that Barth wishes to substitute for that

of his opponents? Does it explain the unity of the three forms of the Word of God? If the time of Christ is made contemporary with the time of the apostles, and with our time also, what does "contemporary" mean?

"The Word of Scripture," he continues, "in its quite different time area, with its quite different time content compared with the Word of revelation . . . is now described as the Word of the prophets and apostles, and as such, as the witness to Christ and in its subordination to the Word of Christ, it simultaneously utters the Word of Christ himself. It is the same step from one time to another . . . when Church proclamation becomes real proclamation, i.e., God's Word" (*ibid.*, p. 169). Historical understanding and philological analysis are necessary for preaching, but these do not make preaching real proclamation. "Proclamation of the Word of God is achieved . . . purely and simply through the power of the Biblical Word itself, which now makes a place for itself in a quite different period . . . Because the Word of God is this act in this step from revelation to Scripture and to Church proclamation, i.e. in the full strict distinction of times, it is one, it is contemporaneous" (*ibid.*, p. 169). Just how the distinction of times can be full and strict, distinct not only by reason of levels in authority but also by the lapse of two thousand years, and at the same time be simultaneous is extremely hard to grasp. But Barth seems conscious of no difficulty and concludes, "The problem of the Word of God is thus from time to time a perfectly definite, once-for-all, peculiar problem, and of this problem we must say that it is solved by the Word of God itself, spoken by the mouth of God, being contemporaneous *illic et tunc* and (i.e., exactly as spoken *illic et tunc*) *hic et nunc*" (*ibid.*, p. 170).

Can we agree with Barth that this solves the problem? It is easy to begin with levels of authority and to suppose that a preacher today repeats the exact words of Paul who received these exact words by divine inspiration. But if we do not begin with levels of authority and wish to justify the superior position of the apostles over us today, the idea of contemporaneity is not only insufficient, but impossible. Nothing is clearer than that two times separated by centuries—other differences are immaterial—are not contemporaneous.¹

In conclusion therefore, and in spite of Barth's immense erudition

¹ Further on time, cf. III 1, p. 72, where the time of the sinner is not real time because it has no past, present, or future.

and his stimulating discussions, of which a student will always remain deeply appreciative, it must be maintained that he has not succeeded in solving his problem. In all these details, so carefully and perhaps so tediously examined, not only 'contemporaneity' but also 'revelation' fails of intelligible definition. This leaves the unity of Barth's three forms unclear and obscures the identity of the Word of God. These difficulties could easily be met, or, better, they would not arise, if the Word of God is identified with the Biblical text, rendered accurate by God's control of the wording. But this would be to revert to the theology of the Protestant Reformation, and that is what Barth does not care to do.

VII

VERBAL REVELATION

But is Protestant orthodoxy, Old Protestantism as Barth sometimes calls it, the theology of the Reformation, of Luther and Calvin, so utterly untenable? Is Barth's new synthesis—for in spite of his claims to be evangelical, in spite of his appeal to Turretin, Luther, and others, in spite of his announced desire to honor Biblical theology, Barth's synthesis is new—is it, we ask, more tenable than the theology of the Reformers? Will not a rejection of verbal inspiration result either in an admitted rejection of Christianity in favor of some other religion, rational or irrational, or in an inconsistent mixture of irrationalism with some Christian themes? Can Biblical authority survive the abandonment of verbal inspiration? More concretely one may inquire into Barth's specific objections against this Reformation doctrine. Are they compelling? Has he correctly stated the doctrine, or do his arguments apply to ideas that Luther and Calvin would not have acknowledged? The general question of verbal revelation and verbal inspiration will therefore serve as a concluding chapter to the present volume.

Barth's Assertion and Denial of Biblical Authority

Since, in the first place, the possibility of inconsistency has so frequently been mentioned, it is best to review and to add to the quota-

tions in which Barth asserts the authority of the Bible. In a passage already quoted in part, Barth says that the distinction between Christ the head and the Church as the body, therefore Christ's superiority over the Church, is concretely expressed in the existence of the Bible. The Bible is superior to all preaching because it is the canon, the rule of faith. It is from the Bible that the Church receives her commission; and this commission, along with the object which the Church proclaims, comes concretely from without "in the complete externality of her concrete canon—as an imperative, categorical yet utterly historical, becoming articulate in time. And by acknowledging that this canon is actually identical with the Bible," the Church admits that the content of her preaching is completely determined by its connection with Holy Scripture (I 1, p. 113). And it will be remembered that a few pages later, in opposition to the episcopal theory of apostolic succession, Barth wrote, "The apostolic succession of the Church must mean that she is guided by the canon, i.e., by the word of prophets and apostles as by the necessary rule of all expression valid in the Church."

Also in the previous chapter Barth was quoted as saying that revelation is the guarantor of the truth of the language of the prophets and apostles (I 1, p. 129). Less definite, but none the less a statement of Biblical authority, is a passage, to be joined with others similar to it in which Barth opposes the Romish view of authority, in which it is the Scripture that prevents the Church from claiming divine authority; for which reason Barth urges the Church to be satisfied with a derivative authority (I 2, pp. 578-579). Consider also a passage not previously quoted: "Scriptural exegesis rests on the assumption that the message which Scripture has to give us, even in its apparently most debatable and least assimilable parts, is in all circumstances truer and more important than the best and most necessary things that we ourselves have said or can say" (I 2, p. 719). If "most debatable" refers to matters such as the divine command to slaughter the Amalekites, and if "least assimilable" refers to the minor details of the Mosaic ritual or the enumerations and genealogies of Numbers and Chronicles, the interest of this quotation lies in its acknowledgment of authority in the most obscure, apparently trivial, or, from the standpoint of modern humanitarianism, morally difficult paragraphs. This would be in keeping with the doctrine of verbal inspiration.

Of course, Barth does not mean it as such. For all his acknowledgment of the canonicity and normative authority of the Bible, he does not accept Biblical guidance with respect to inspiration. He does not accept the Bible's view of itself. On the very same page he alters, while professing to admire, the principles of the Reformation. "This is the deeper meaning of the only apparently tautological exegetical rule of the older Protestant orthodoxy, whereby an interpretation of Scripture is to be recognized as true or false by the fact that, if it is true, it is in accord with Scripture so far as this is the Word of God: *Norma interpretandi scripturam et judicandi de interpretatione scripturae sacrae verane sit an falsa, est ipsamet scriptura sacra, quae vox Dei est.*" But the words of Barth and the Latin words of Polanus do not say the same thing. Is it a good translation of *scriptura sacra, quae vox Dei est* to say "Scripture so far as this is the Word of God?" Barth is altering the Protestant principle, as indeed the next part of Polanus' Latin again shows: "*Quaecunque enim interpretatio consentit cum scriptura, illa est vera et ex Deo; quaecunque ab ea dissentit, est falsa et non est ex Deo.*" In English: Any interpretation that agrees with Scripture is true and is of God; any interpretation that disagrees with Scripture is false and is not of God. Polanus says nothing whatever of Scripture "so far as Scripture is the Word of God."

The discarding of verbal inspiration shows itself specifically in the attribution of error to the Biblical text. Speaking of the "extraordinary significance of chronology in the Old and New Testaments" Barth refers to the patriarchal ages in Genesis, the rise of the prophets, and the various historical co-ordinates of the place of Jesus Christ at the beginning of the Gospels. All this, he says, is "presented with a rare exactitude." Nevertheless, "in this, use may have been made of antiquated number-symbolics or number mysticism, whereby arithmetical errors, whimsies and impossibilities may have crept in." The combination of "rare exactitude" with "arithmetical errors" is another instance of the two opposing and puzzling poles of Barth's thought. The following sentence compounds the difficulty. "But the wonderful thing to be noted here in the Bible is not the correctness or incorrectness in content of the temporal figures, but their thorough-going importance as time data, which is but underlined by incidental number mysticism and other liberties. There is not a suggestion that revelation and its attestation might have been localized

just as well elsewhere or anywhere in historical space" (I 2, pp. 50-51). In other words, we seem to be left with the implication that rare exactitude means locating an event with perfect precision at the place and time it did not happen.

Another instance of Barth's combining high praise for the Bible with a rejection of the truth of its statements comes only a few pages later. He is in process of rebuking the modernists for seeking the "historical Jesus" in or behind the New Testament. The attempt to find a non-miraculous mere man, a deluded enthusiast or a lofty moral teacher, is theologically and even historically impossible. Martin Kähler is credited with having seen this at a time when the quest of the historical Jesus was in full swing. One reason that Kähler gave was that the real historical Jesus is no other than the Biblical Christ, the incarnate Word, the risen and exalted One. A second reason, not nearly so good, is that the Gospels are not historical sources, but testimonies. But Barth thinks that this is a good reason too. "The fact that the statement 'God reveals himself' is the confession of a miracle that has happened certainly does not imply a blind credence in all the miracle stories related in the Bible. . . . Why should we not constantly find this or that one of the miracles obscure, why should we not be constantly taken aback by them? It is really not laid upon us to take everything in the Bible as true *in globo*, but it is laid upon us to listen to its testimony when we actually hear it" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

That Barth rejects the infallibility of the Bible needs no further documentation. The Fundamentalists long ago underlined this phase of his teaching. More recently some Evangelicals have defended him on the ground that he has changed his mind in the meantime. It is true, as we have seen, that he has changed his mind on certain points, but not on this one. *Church Dogmatics* is as much opposed to Biblical infallibility as was previously *The Word of God and the Word of Man*.¹ What then precisely is Barth's theory of inspiration?

¹ Professor Markus Barth of the University of Chicago, son of Karl Barth, wrote a letter protesting against what he considered to be a misrepresentation of his father in *Christianity Today*. Possibly he had in mind one of my signed articles or an unsigned editorial. This is what he said: "Do you realize that my father has never said, either in his *Dogmatics* or in the Panel Discussions in Chicago, that the Bible *does* err? *Christianity Today* always gave the impression as if in so many words he had said precisely this."

In reply to this accusation of inaccuracy, a correspondent, Mr. John K. Mickelson of Liverpool, N. Y., in *Christianity Today*, Oct. 12, 1962, p. 22, quoted the *Church Dogmatics* I 2, pp. 528-529: "The prophets and apostles as such, even in their office, . . . were real historical men as we are, and . . . actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word."

Barth's View of Inspiration

In discussing II Timothy 3:14-17 and II Peter 1:19-21 Barth notes that both passages refer to the recollection of past revelation and the expectation of future revelation. In II Timothy, between these two parts, there is the statement, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, "all, that is the whole Scripture is—literally: 'of the Spirit of God,' i.e., given and filled and ruled by the Spirit of God, and actively outbreathing and spreading abroad and making known the Spirit of God . . . At the center of the passage a statement is made about the relationship between God and the Scripture, which can be understood only as a disposing act and decision of God himself, which cannot therefore be expanded but to which only a—necessarily brief—reference can be made. At the decisive point all that we have to say about it can consist only in an underlining and delimiting of the inaccessible mystery of the free grace in which the Spirit of God is present and active before and above and in the Bible" (I 2, p. 504) .

Speaking of both Scriptural passages Barth finds "the decisive center" to be "a reference to the Holy Spirit, and indeed in such a way that he is described as the real author of what is stated or written in Scripture. . . . But there can be no question of any ignoring or violating of their [the prophets'] *auctoritas* and therefore of their humanity. . . . as though they were not real *auctores*, as though in what they spoke or wrote they did not make full use of their human capacities . . . *Theopneustia* in the bounds of Biblical thinking cannot mean anything but the special attitude of obedience in those who are elected and called to this obviously special service . . . They [wrote] individually, each within his own psychological, biographical, and historical possibilities, and therefore within the limits set by those possibilities . . ." (*ibid.*, p. 505) .

It is strange that after quoting II Timothy 3:16 Barth can assert "*Theopneustia* in the bounds of Biblical thinking cannot mean anything but the special attitude of obedience in those who are elected and called to this obviously special service." *Theopneustia* may include, but it certainly does not primarily refer to a special attitude on the part of the apostles. *Theopneustia* is the act of God in breathing out what the apostles wrote. It is indeed "a disposing act of God" as Barth himself says, though something more can be said of it beyond the vague notion that it underlines and delimits the inaccessible

mystery of free grace. Barth himself says more. He recognizes that the Scriptural passages make the Holy Spirit the real author of what the apostles wrote. It is also true that the Holy Spirit did not ignore or violate their humanity. They made full use—as full as most of us do most of the time—of their psychological and biographical possibilities. There are other passages in Barth, to which we shall refer later, and there are passages without number in other authors, which unjustifiably suggest that the exponents of verbal inspiration deny this. B. B. Warfield drew attention to these inferences and pointedly rebuked the common liberal misrepresentation of verbal inspiration. The only accountable assumption from which such inferences could be drawn is the peculiar prejudice that their humanity is violated if the apostles accurately report revealed information.

Because Barth's idea that inspiration should never be allowed to violate the humanity of the prophets and apostles recurs frequently in other theologians also, one paragraph might be given to what is apparently the presupposition of this concern. Does it not seem that the fear of violating humanity presupposes the view that humanity at large is free from divine determinism? Then when Jeremiah and Paul come under the control of inspiration, they lose the free will they previously had and their psychological habits are abruptly changed. But Calvinism denies free will and holds that God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, that God works all things after the counsel of his own will. There is therefore no violation of Jeremiah's or Paul's humanity because God makes their humanity what it is. They are no more under God's control than are Barth and Schleiermacher; nor are Barth and Schleiermacher less controlled than Jeremiah and Paul. Only the details and the result of the control are different. God controlled the prophets to write the canon; he foreordained Schleiermacher to write damnable heresy.

Barth might have taken warning from one of his own quotations from Calvin: *Impulsos fuisse dicit, non quod mente alienati fuerint (qualem in suis prophetis ἐνθουσιασμόν fingunt gentiles), sed quia nihil a se ipsis ausi fuerint: tantum obedienter sequuti sint Spiritum ducem, qui in ipsorum ore tanquam in suo sacrario regnabat.* In English paraphrase: Peter says that holy men of God were impelled, not because they were deranged as the heathen imagine the enthusiasm of their own prophets, but because they ventured nothing on their own authority: so obediently did they follow the leading of the

Spirit, who reigned in their mouths as if in his own chapel. Yet this denial of mantic enthusiasm does not justify the conclusion that the psychological and biographical possibilities of the prophets set the limits of what they wrote. In view of Barth's strong antipathy to natural theology and independent anthropology, this statement seems strange. The imposition of such limits would rule out both predictive prophecy and the doctrine of the Trinity. With Barth's emphasis on the Trinity one might have expected him to admit that God could and did give the apostles information unattainable within the limits of their natural resources. Although otherwise most of what Barth says about inspiration on these two pages is good and true, the account is deficient because there are two things he does not say: he does not say that inspiration gave the apostles information, and he does not say that inspiration, the authorship of the Holy Spirit, guarantees the truth of what they wrote, "all, that is the whole Scripture . . . literally."

After this excursus Barth continues for some pages to describe Scripture as the Word of God. Parts of his discussion are hard to understand. For example, he insists that belief involves "recognizing and knowing. Believing is not an obscure and indeterminate feeling. It is a clear hearing, apperceiving, thinking and then speaking and doing" (I 2, p. 506). Now, clear hearing and thinking are indeed requirements of a rational religion; but rationality is very much interested in what one hears and thinks. It is this object of belief that is obscure in Barth. At first it seems that Barth here will have us believe only the one proposition that the Bible is the Word of God; and he makes some remarks, similar to those he has often expressed, on the incapacity of man to produce this belief. It can be produced only by an overmastering confrontation. So Calvin also said. But belief simply that the Bible is the Word of God gives us little to think and speak about, and less to do. Such a bare belief has neither religious advantage nor theological importance. Only if a theologian, a preacher, a Christian believes what the Bible says, can he preach a message of forgiveness of sins. But Barth, ignoring this most important of all points, follows another interest, and again seems to minimize the message. He is interested in showing what cannot convince us that the Bible is the Word of God. We ourselves do not have such a capacity; but, further, "It is also that if we are serious about the true humanity of the Bible, we obviously cannot

attribute to the Bible as such the capacity . . . in such a way to reveal God to us that by its very presence, by the fact that we can read it, it gives us a hearty faith in the Word of God spoken in it" (*ibid.*, p. 506-507).

This is the beginning of a somewhat awkward argument. Is it necessary to emphasize the fact that the mere presence of the Bible and our reading it do not of themselves produce a hearty faith? Even the Lutherans, who are supposed to neglect the testimony of the Spirit, do not say that the reading of the Bible automatically produces faith. If it did, everyone who has ever read the Bible, or even part of it, would be a believer. The more important question is, Does the Bible, perhaps not by its mere presence, but at least by our attentively reading it, reveal God? Stress on the idea of hearty faith obscures the contents of the Bible as the truths to be believed.

But Barth continues: "It is there and always there as a sign, as a human and temporal word—and therefore also as a word which is conditioned and limited. It witnesses to God's revelation, but that does not mean that God's revelation is now before us in any kind of divine revealedness. The Bible is not a book of oracles; it is not an instrument of direct impartation. It is a genuine witness. And how can it be witness of divine revelation, if the actual purpose, act and decision of God . . . is dissolved in the Bible into a sum total of truths abstracted from that decision—and those truths are then propounded to us as truths of faith, salvation, and revelation? If it tries to be more than witness, to be direct impartation, will it not keep us from the best, the one real thing, which God intends to tell us and give us and which we really need?" (I 2, p. 507).

These last two sentences are rhetorical questions, whose answers seem obvious to Barth. To someone else the answers are either not obvious or obviously the opposite of what Barth thinks. Twice on this half page Barth has referred to the humanity of the Bible. Let us not forget the ambiguity of the term. Does Barth mean merely that the human authors of the Bible were not unconscious or deranged Pythontes? Or does he mean that the humanity of the authors prevents the Bible from being true? If a human author can tell the truth and can accurately repeat the information that God has given him, why is not God's revelation now before us in some kind of revealedness? Why is not the Bible a book of oracles? At least in English the word is used in the New Testament. But if the word oracles

in Barth's vocabulary has some unpleasant connotation, why cannot the Bible be an instrument of direct impartation? Again, if Barth by the term direct means merely to say that God spoke to the prophets directly, and to us mediately by their writings, no Old Protestant would deny it. But this triviality is not what Barth seems to have in mind; for he draws some sort of distinction between divine revelation and its being dissolved into a sum total of truths. Once again Barth's ambiguity confuses the reader. The Bible cannot be a witness, he maintains, if divine revelation is dissolved into a sum total of truths abstracted from God's act, purpose, and decision. Abstraction here may mean the viewpoint of an unbeliever who denies that the Bible springs from the divine act of inspiration: he takes its statements as the true or erroneous opinions of ancient authors and nothing more. Naturally a Reformer would also deny this type of abstraction. But if abstraction means that revelation is to be equated with the divine act of inspiration so that what the prophet writes cannot continue as a revelation from God, cannot be a sum total of truths, truths of faith and salvation, not only will the Reformer disagree, but he will be most curious as to the reason behind such a view. The reason Barth gives is that in this case man will lose the best, the one real thing which God intends to tell us. This is very puzzling. How by writing down what God tells us could anyone lose what God wishes to tell us? Does God intend to tell us that Christ died and rose again? Then do we lose this information by reading it in the Bible? Or, is it that in the back of Barth's mind he half thinks that God does not wish to tell us anything? This is of course inconsistent with all that he has said about rational communication, but it is hard to make sense of the present passage on any other assumption. For it is on this assumption alone that Barth can write, "But the theopneustia of the Bible, the attitude of obedience in which it is written, the compelling fact that in it true men speak to us in the name of the true God: this—and here is the miracle of it—is not simply before us because the Bible is before us and we read the Bible. The theopneustia is the act of revelation in which the prophets and apostles in their humanity became what they were, and in which alone in their humanity they can become to us what they are" (*ibid.*, pp. 507-508).

Note how vague most of this is. The one thing that is not vague is Barth's application of the idea of inspiration to the apostles rather

than to the writings. This human locus of inspiration recurs in later volumes. In an interesting and valuable discussion of the account of creation in Genesis, Barth fixes inspiration in the imagination of the Jewish writer. To be sure this imagination is notably different from the imagination of Babylonian and Egyptian myth-writers, and Barth has succeeded in sharply contrasting Babylonian myths with the Hebrew saga; but nonetheless inspiration is found in the imagination of the writer: "It is because they are imaginative in this different way that they are inspired." Or, again, the Biblical witnesses speak as men and not as angels; thus we have to reckon with all kinds of human factors, particularly with the limitations of their imaginations. "The Biblical creation-histories are not heaven-sent declarations of the truth itself . . . but human attestations of the revelation . . . They do it through the imagination . . . of these men who in themselves are as fallible as others. They are not, then, an adequate but a very inadequate medium. . . . Their relationship to their object is the very unequal one of a heavenly treasure to earthly vessels . . . It is in this relationship, and only [!] in this relationship, that they are inspired" (III 1, pp. 92, 93).

In the Biblical view of inspiration, however, it is not so much the writers that are inspired as it is the words written. Paul said that the Scripture is God-breathed; it is the words written that were breathed out by God. It was not the apostles who were breathed out. Barth changes this assertion of Paul and centers inspiration in an effect produced by God in the apostles themselves. This much of Barth's theory of inspiration is clear. But most of the rest is vague. He calls it a compelling fact that the Bible was written by true men who speak to us in the name of the true God; but unless what they said is true, the fact that they were truly men will not enhance the value of the Bible over that of other books. Nor is it enlightening to hear that in the act of revelation the apostles in their humanity became what they were. One wishes to know precisely what this is. Did they become the authors of true statements, or were they as the result of God's act of inspiration fallible erring men like ourselves? It is on this same page that Barth tells us that the apostles "whom we hear as witnesses speak as fallible erring men like ourselves." Can godly religion, can historical Christianity, can an informative Gospel message, survive, if tied to errors, whimsies, contradictions, and number mysticism?

In the excursus which follows Barth makes an effort to escape the

blunt accusation that he bases his religion on falsehoods. He wishes to recognize the Bible's divine perfection in spite of its human imperfection; he will distinguish between "inspiration and therefore the divine infallibility of the Bible and its human fallibility." From the truism that the writers of Scripture did not possess an encyclopedic knowledge of all things in heaven and earth, natural, historical, and human, Barth proceeds to assert that they shared the culture of their age, whose form and content could be contested by us. Barth really means that they not only shared these ancient and doubtful views, but that they advocated them in their canonical writings. Therefore "in the Biblical view of the world and man we are constantly coming up against presuppositions that are not ours, and statements and judgments which we cannot accept." But instead of talking about errors in the Bible, it is better, says Barth, "to speak only about their 'capacity for error.' For in the last resort even in relation to the general view of the world and man the insight and knowledge of our age can be neither divine nor even solomonic" (*ibid.*, pp. 508-509).

This last sentence expresses a noteworthy and praiseworthy thought. The philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is not necessarily better than that of earlier ages, nor dare we suppose that our vaunted science will never be discarded. The modern mind therefore with its up-to-date myths and prejudices will serve neither as a firm foundation for nor as a base of attack against Christian dogmatics. For this reason, instead of blindly capitulating to the newest critical theory, we might as well accept the Biblical world-view as our axiom and presupposition. This Biblical view does not deny, rather it asserts, that the prophets were fallible and actually made mistakes in their daily life. To this extent they shared the culture of their age. But they did not teach such erroneous themes in their canonical writings. In the lines just quoted Barth shows a healthy skepticism of contemporary claims to infallibility; and he wisely retreats from accusing the prophets of error to the more modest assertion of their capacity for error. But in the following paragraphs he quickly recedes from this modest position.

He begins with a statement that is factually debatable. "Like all ancient literature the Old and New Testaments know nothing of the distinction of fact and value . . . between history on the one hand and saga and legend on the other" (I 2, p. 509).

Excursus. To lay the foundation for the divine infallibility of the Bible in the face of its human fallibility, Barth had previously distinguished history and saga from myth (I 1, pp. 373-378). What he means by myth is easily understood. A myth is an imaginative story that describes in concrete terms some general truth or constant relation among things. A myth is not historical; it does not intend to narrate a unique event. Aesop's fables, for example, tell of what may happen anytime and anywhere. The subject is flattery, industry, or any lesson in common morality. The Greek myths represent repeatable natural phenomena, such as rain, the growth of crops, and the cycle of the seasons. No unique event is intended. Now, the Bible is not myth. The Bible intends to talk about datable, unique events, and not mere general relations that occur all the time. This does not mean, however, that the Bible is historical throughout. Barth distinguishes history from saga, as well as history and saga from myth. But whereas the idea of myth seems clear enough, one must read carefully to discover what Barth means by history.

Revelation, he says, is an historical event, but not in the usual sense of historical, i.e., as apprehensible or as apprehended by a neutral observer. "What the neutral observer of these events . . . may have apprehended was the form of revelation, not regarded by him as such . . . [but] some sort of happening unrolling itself in the human sphere, having all the possibilities of interpretation appropriate in this sphere, but in no case revelation as such." Barth supplies an example: "Thousands may have seen and heard the Rabbi of Nazareth. But this historical element was not revelation. Even the historical element at the resurrection of Christ, the empty grave regarded as an element in this event, . . . was certainly not revelation. This historical element, like everything historical, is admittedly susceptible of an even highly trivial interpretation" (p. 373). According to this quotation history must be something apprehensible by a neutral observer; and what is not thus apprehensible is the interpretation placed by a man of faith upon the observed event. It seems to follow therefore that the Bible is non-historical because it is an interpretation of happenings unrolling themselves in the human sphere.

Two related points can be made here. First, the earlier argument concerning science, the outside world, and apologetics raised a serious question as to the existence of any neutral observer. Everyone occupies some standpoint. Even though confused and inconsistent, as most people are, everyone has axioms and presuppositions. Therefore what Barth calls the usual sense of the word *historical* refers to something non-existent. From this it follows in the second place that the Bible is as historical as any other book. If Christian faith places its interpretation on events, no less does idealism or materialism. Hegel's history in particular is an extreme example of the role of interpretation, and the economic determinism of Karl Marx is equally extreme. Besides these there are H. T. Buckle, Burkhardt, Spengler, and Toynbee. All historians write history on the basis of certain principles just as inapprehensible by a neutral observer, i.e., just as little

founded on bare empirical observation, as any Christian principles are. If interpretation *per se* prevents a book from being historical, then there are no history books; otherwise Barth would be forced to the strange position that Hegelian or Marxian books can be historical, but that only Christian principles are incompatible with history. But whatever history may mean, and even if it means uninterpreted events, we cannot agree with Barth that the Bible is uninterested in historical certainty.

Further light on Barth's idea of history can be had in a later volume (III 1, pp. 77-94), where he returns to the discussion of history, saga, and myth in connection with the difficulties of the doctrine of creation. The fact that no human being witnessed the creation of the world "has often led to a denial of the historicity and temporality of creation and the reinterpretation of the Biblical witness as a declaration which really aims at an unhistorical and timeless relationship between the Creator and the creature. . . . The Biblical witness must oppose such a reinterpretation. Even here it can only recount history. . . . [But] how can this history be an object of human knowledge at all? . . . How can anyone have seen and comprehended this event?" (p. 77).

Barth's explanation is approximately as follows: "History which we cannot see and comprehend is not history in the historicist sense. This history, i.e., the history which is accessible to man because it is visible and perceptible . . . is creaturely history," where prior and subsequent events can be "compared and integrated." Obviously creation is not such. Therefore creation history "is not history in the historicist sense and there can be no history of it. For this reason it is a 'non-historical' history. . . . This is true of all history to the extent that God's creation continues in it. . . . [Indeed] all history is properly and finally important and noteworthy only to the extent that it has this element and is thus not only historical but 'non-historical' in the historicist sense. . . . What does it mean to see and grasp a real miracle? What does it mean to perceive and establish a resurrection from the dead? In this case the historical element in the event seems almost to have disappeared and the 'non-historical' to have taken the upper hand. . . . If in the case of other histories we can at a pinch overlook or reinterpret the 'non-historical' element (to the detriment of a true appreciation) it is not very easy to do so at this point. . . . It is only in part that we have to do with 'history' and 'historical' accounts. Yet we have to do so in part. For even here there is always a certain relationship" to other visible events, and "the 'historical' element is not wholly extinguished." But creation is wholly 'non-historical,' "for what *could* actually be perceptible and comprehensible and therefore 'historical' in this story?" (III 1, pp. 78-79).

In the present argument we are not primarily interested in creation. Granted, no man saw God create the universe; neither did any man see the geological changes that occurred before the creation of man. If now the historicist sense of history restricts the usage of the word to events that men have seen (plus an interpretation), why should anyone object to this

semantic nicety? It merely means that geology is not to be called history. It does not mean that these particular events did not occur. However, we are here much more interested in the resurrection. And when we ask, Is the resurrection of Christ historical? we mean, Did it really happen? No doubt this involves its integration with prior events, for if Christ had not died and been buried, he could not have risen from the grave. But when Barth calls both creation and the resurrection "non-historical," he seems to shift the meaning of this term. Creation is non-historical because no man was there to see it; but the empty tomb and the living Christ are non-historical because the apostles put a Christian interpretation on the visible facts. In the latter sense Barth is right when he says that all history is important and noteworthy only to the extent that it is "non-historical." But if this is the case, why should this unreal distinction have been made in the first place, and why should saga have been introduced to take the place of history?

That Barth has in mind something more radical than this unreal distinction is strongly suggested by his ridicule of "the middle-class habit of the modern western mind which is supremely fantastic in its chronic lack of imaginative phantasy, and hopes to rid itself of its complexes through suppression. . . . It acts as if only 'historical' history were genuine history, and 'non-historical' false" (III 1, p. 81). This intemperate language does not seem properly to apply to anyone. It does not apply to the liberals because they would never say that geology, because 'non-historical,' is false. It does not properly apply to secular historians because Barth's definition of "historicism" is wide of the mark. Nor does it apply to fundamentalists because they too would hardly object to the verbal and unreal distinction, though they would certainly call false any narrative that described events which never occurred. It seems therefore that under the term saga, Barth wants to defend the value of narratives that are non-historical in a sense more radical than that of his verbal definition.

"In what follows," says Barth, "I am using saga in the sense of an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space. . . . In the Bible we usually have to reckon with both history and saga" (*ibid.*, pp. 81-82). To suppose that the Bible is the Word of God only when historical, Barth continues, has unfortunate consequences. It led to uncertainty of faith among the liberals; it led the fundamentalists to close their eyes to the sagas the Bible in fact contains; and in other cases it led to a search for the Bible's historical kernel, a search which resulted, with the dropping of saga, in the loss of the Bible's main theme. All three cases depend on the inadmissible postulate of western thought which assumes that the reality of a history stands or falls by whether it is "history" (*ibid.*, p. 82).

The ordinary English meaning of saga is a story, perhaps based on actual occurrences, but highly conventional in form, with fictitious elaborations (Merriam-Webster). Barth clearly believes, not only that the early

chapters of Genesis are sagas, but that much else is also. Some of Barth's phraseology gives the impression that the events of Biblical saga have actually occurred, but that the narrative is called saga merely because the events were not seen by men, as in the case of creation, or sometimes, perhaps, merely because there was only one witness or because there is only one manuscript source, which makes comparison and verification impossible. However, Barth does not firmly rule out all fictitious elaboration. Therefore his discussion of history in its alleged several senses, of uninterpreted events, of neutral observers like the Roman soldiers and unbelieving Jews who put a highly trivial interpretation on the empty tomb, raises this query: if a non-revelational interpretation can thus be given to an historical event, is it also possible for a non-historical event, i.e., something that never happened, to be somehow interpreted as revelation?

Barth's answer to this question is not easy to discover; he seems to have a different point of interest, some of his expressions are disappointingly vague, and consistency does not lie on the surface. Precise historicity does not seem to be his main concern: "On the question of the 'historical' certainty of the revelation attested in the Bible we can only say that in the Bible itself it remains out of account in a way explicable only on the ground that this question is simply foreign to it." But how can Barth be so uninterested in historical certainty, or, rather, how can he suppose that historical certainty is foreign to the Bible? From the preface of the Ten Commandments, which ties them to a great event in history, to the apostles' insistent report that Jesus rose from the dead, the Bible lays great stress on events that actually occurred. It is beside the point to say that a neutral observer by the use of ordinary methods of historical investigation could establish "not merely little but nothing" of the "mystery," i.e., the theological interpretation, of such events; but to add that the historical occurrence is "quite without importance for the event of revelation" runs contrary to all that the Bible says. In place of the historical certainty of the exodus and the resurrection and so on Barth insists that the Biblical concept of historicity is "a concrete relation to concrete men." To the extent that this phrase rules out modernism's reliance on the study of men in general, Biblical theologians will be gratified; but so vague and general is "a concrete relation to concrete men" that it is a poor substitute for Moses on the march and Christ walking to Emmaus. Revelation, Barth admits, is not "an abstract metaphysic . . . claiming to hold good [to be immanent] always and everywhere"; on the contrary, "it is rather the narrative about an event which took place uniquely, i.e., in a place and at a time always more or less exactly determined." But if the words of Barth are true, why does he disparage historicity?

Granted that we today can determine only more or less exactly the date of the exodus or even of Christ's resurrection; granted too that in certain cases an interest in the exact date is foreign to the Bible; yet in many other cases the Bible is very precise on dates (II Kings 25:1; Ezra 6:15; Ezek. 1:1; Dan. 1:1, 9:1-2; etc.), and in all cases the actual occurrence of the concrete

event is essential. Whether or not we can co-ordinate our calendars with ancient calendars, whether the day or only the year or even only the reign is given, and whether "the separate data provided by the Bible . . . are open to historical criticism," Barth has no grounds for saying that these are "documents of a date and civilization which had no knowledge at all [!] of an historical question in our sense," much less that "no serious part, even in the sense possible in that time and in that civilization, could be played by historical interest in the composition of those documents which did in fact claim to be documents of revelation" (I 1, p. 374). Barth immediately insists that this disregard of historicity "makes no difference to the fact that by the thing it calls revelation the Bible always means a unique event, one occurring in that place and at that time." By this unique event Barth must mean, not so much the empty tomb, as a subjective change wrought by God in the heart of some one individual person. But does the Bible teach that God works subjective faith apart from the historical occurrence of the exodus and the resurrection? To say the Bible is "simply quite unconcerned" about its "errors," and that "the important thing is not the more or less 'correct' content of these statements, but the fact of them," betrays a confusion of thought. If the statement of an event is not "correct," then it does not refer to any factual occurrence. If a book should say that Washington crossed the Mississippi in 1810, it can contribute nothing to our belief in a quite different fact of the American Revolution. We very much agree with Barth that when "the Bible . . . repeatedly and with extraordinary emphasis makes chronological and topographical statements, . . . it means every time to ascribe to the revelation of God of which it tells a temporally and spatially circumscribed place"; and we agree that the Bible does not mean "to recount a relationship between God and man existing generally, always and everywhere, or discoverable in process, but an event that took place there and only there, then and only then" (p. 375); but apparently in disagreement with Barth we hold that the Bible means to assert, not only that what he calls revelation, a man's receiving the gift of faith, occurred at a given time and place, but also that what he calls the form of revelation, the empty tomb and the like, occurred with as much precision. The Bible does not assert merely the general truth that revelation is historical; it asserts that very definite events are revelation. Neither the Bible nor we can be quite unconcerned about historical errors.

This lack of interest in the factuality of the "form" of revelation, i.e., the exodus and the resurrection, is supported by vague phraseology. In particular Barth separates ordinary historicity from a special divine historicity, and in doing so seems to confuse historicity with theological interpretation. Consider the following: "To listen to such history as that which is an event in the revelation attested in the Bible, clearly cannot mean to hold such a happening to be possible, probable, or even real, on the basis of a general concept of historical truth" (p. 375). Now, inasmuch as the exodus can be held to be not only possible and probable, but even real, on the basis of ordinary historical investigation, Barth must mean by

the event which cannot be so held a Christian's understanding of this exodus as the "form" of revelation. He continues to the effect that "stories of events which have taken place between God and men . . . fall, on their human side, . . . under the general concept of history. But they do not fall under it on their divine side." To suppose that God has acted in this human and temporal form would be to abandon the secular presuppositions of general history and to put faith in the Biblical witness. "About the *special* historicity of the story . . . it can really form no 'historical' judgment." But here Barth seems to have confused historicity with theological interpretation. The Bible is interested in both: both the factuality of the exodus and the empty tomb, and the truth of the interpretation that here God acted in the way of special revelation. But the theological doctrine is not an historical event.

This false distinction between general and special historicity leads Barth into expressions that might seem to deny any necessity for the factuality of the Biblical narratives. He writes, "Listening to such history as that which is an event in the revelation attested in the Bible may also—and this is not quite so obvious—be independent of the 'historical' judgment upon its temporal form. . . . Again, the judgment in virtue of which a Biblical story was not to be regarded with probability as 'history' in the sense of the general concept, but perhaps with probability . . . to be regarded not as 'history'—this judgment is not necessarily the judgment of unbelief upon the Biblical witness: for such a judgment may be passed and the story yet be regarded in its special nature, i.e., as history between God and man" (I 1, p. 375).

To make clear what these words may possibly mean, we can rephrase them by inserting a specific example. Since Barth's principle here is entirely general, any example will do; so instead of choosing the battle of the five Kings in Genesis 14, we shall choose a better known narrative. Accordingly, listening to the narrative of the resurrection may be quite independent of the historical judgment that Christ really rose from the dead. To regard the resurrection as probably unhistorical is not disbelief in the apostles' witness to that alleged fact, for we may regard the story as something divine rather than as something human, temporal, and historical.

Does this lack of interest in "general" historicity, i.e., the historicity of actual events like Caesar's Gallic Wars or the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, turn the Bible into mythology? No; we have already seen that the narratives in the Bible are not myths—they are sagas. A saga has a temporal form; a myth does not. If revelation is connected with myth, it is dissolved into natural theology, immanentism, modernism, and humanism. But saga is different. Saga has a temporal form; it *means* history; and therefore "this fundamental uncertainty about its [the Bible's] general historicity, but combined with the positive judgment that there and there saga or legend is actually present, need not necessarily attack the substance of the Biblical witness" (p. 376), because (may we add?) the factuality of Christ's rising from the dead is not the substance of what the apostles were trying to say. "The category of saga, the throwing of doubt upon the general

historicity of the Bible narratives is not an attack on the substance of the Bible as witness" (p. 378). But orthodox Christians have always believed that the death and resurrection of Christ are rather substantial parts of the Gospel.

Before the interruption of this excursus we were saying that Barth momentarily receded from a charge of error against Scripture to the more modest assertion of its capacity for error. This showed a healthy skepticism of the results of destructive criticism. But unfortunately he soon resumes his prior position. The excursus opened at the quotation in which Barth stated that the Bible, New Testament as well as Old, knows nothing of the distinction between fact and value, history and saga. How could anyone read the Gospels and make such a statement? How could anyone study the missionary journeys of Paul and fail to observe the historical and geographical detail? Or, for that matter, what about the care with which the Old Testament writers speak of their geography so that some archaeologists regard it as a better guide book to Palestine than any written since? These details cannot simply be brushed off as saga. If there is anything clear about the Bible, it is that the authors distinguished sharply between history and cunningly devised fables, for these things were not done in a corner. Hence it is impossible to follow Barth when he says, "we cannot attach any final seriousness to this distinction and therefore any final difficulty to the objections to which it gives rise." The excursus pointed up the final seriousness of objections to Christianity based on a denial of the historicity of Biblical events. Nor again can we see how, even on Barth's position, "simply believing the Word of God," without believing its contents, provides a base for a rational religion.

At any rate, Barth neither restricts himself to charging the apostles with a capacity for error, nor does he limit the error to matters of mere historicity. He asserts that actual errors exist and that they exist in the theological content. "The vulnerability of the Bible, i.e., its capacity for error, also extends to its religious or theological content" (*ibid.*, p. 509). The authors so echo their contemporaries that what they saw seems to be robbed of its character as a witness to revelation. "That they speak of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ, and not of other entities, is something we have laboriously to work out and prove . . . and we can never do it with unimpeachable evidence, but in the last resort only on the presupposition of faith." Then in a few lines, leaving this limited skepticism behind, he asserts, "There are obvious

overlappings and contradictions—e.g., between the Law and the prophets, between John and the Synoptists, between Paul and James . . . We are led now one way, now another . . . and in both ways, and whoever is the author, we are always confronted with the question of faith. Again, we must be careful not to be betrayed into taking sides, into playing off the one Biblical man against the other, into pronouncing that this one or that has ‘erred.’ From what standpoint can we make any such pronouncement? For within certain limits they are all vulnerable and therefore capable of error even in respect of religion and theology. In view of the actual constitution of the Old and New Testaments this is something which we cannot possibly deny if we are not to take away their humanity, if we are not to be guilty of Docetism. How can they be witnesses, if this is not the case?” (*ibid.*, pp. 509-510). Does this not imply that the Biblical witnesses are false witnesses who stand condemned by the ninth commandment?

Several points must be made here. First, to repeat, it is now clear that by the term humanity, Barth means that the writers of the Bible must have made mistakes in what they wrote. The assumption is that an ordinary human being cannot tell the truth. To say that a man can tell the truth in some sentences, but that eventually he will make a mistake as he continues, is a reply that does not consist with Barth’s view of humanity. For if God can guide a man to write one sentence without error, he can guide him to write a second and a third and a whole book. The kind of humanity that Barth requires is a humanity that characterizes everything a man does and says. Therefore Barth dare not admit that God can verbally inspire even one sentence, for such an admission would remove all basis for an argument against verbal inspiration.

Then, second, it is clear that Barth has abandoned his praiseworthy skepticism because he explicitly asserts that the Biblical writers contradict each other. If this is a fact, it is also a fact that one part of the contradiction is an actual error, and not merely a capacity for error. It may well be that in the absence of sufficient historical or archaeological evidence, we today cannot tell which of the two is right and which has made the mistake;¹ it may well be that in the absence of

¹ Further complications: if two authors contradict one another, not only must one be wrong, the other must be right. In spite of this humanity therefore this other author has made a true assertion. Then why is verbal inspiration impossible? Another allegation of “irreconcilable contradictions” is found in III 1, p. 80.

information on the content of God's mind, we cannot tell whether James' theology or Paul's is correct, but we know (shall we say infallibly?) that one of them is wrong. Barth therefore is not skeptical on this point. He definitely accepts enough of modern science and criticism, enough of certain types of exegesis, to be convinced that the apostles wrote some things that are false.

Now, in the third place, if these errors are not merely historical or chronological errors, but if they are errors of theology and religion, why should the Church accept the Bible as a canon and use it as a judge of all its proclamation? At least three times in this paragraph Barth tries to escape this embarrassment by appealing to faith. But what sort of a faith is it by which we believe what we know to be false? What kind of a religion is it that leads us now one way, now another, and then both ways? Barth has to his own satisfaction shown the human fallibility of the Scripture, but who can be satisfied that he has made clear its divine infallibility?

History of the Doctrine

Barth comes closer to grips with the doctrine of verbal inspiration itself in the next excursus (I 2, pp. 514-526). After two pages of exegesis he begins a history of the doctrine from the Early Church to the present. Whereas Barth himself extends the idea of inspiration to include those who read the Bible, the Early Church "soon displayed a striking inclination to concentrate interest in the inspiration of Scripture upon one particular point in that circle, and to limit it . . . to the work of the Spirit in the emergence of the spoken or written prophetic and apostolic word as such" (p. 517). "Now this point cannot . . . be regarded as unimportant." But it is a one-sided viewpoint, for we cannot understand the inspiration of the prophets and apostles, "if we do not keep equally before us . . . that the hearers and readers of what they spoke and wrote have need of the work of the same Spirit if they are really to read and hear it." God's act of free grace is obscured, if we put in the foreground only the inspiration of the prophets, and reduce it to the act of the prophets in writing. To center attention on the inspiration of the Scriptures is to attempt "to make the miracle of God in the witness of his revelation perspicuous to everybody, conceivable in its inconceivability, natural for all the emphasizing of its supernatural character." And he sug-

gests that this leads to ascribing the same inspiration to the Sibylline Oracles.

“Already in the Early Church we see a tendency to insist that the operation of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Biblical writers extended to the individual phraseology used by them in the grammatical sense of the concept. . . . Here too, in the light of Matthew 5:17 ff. we must be on our guard against trying to say anything different. If in their concrete existence and therefore in their concrete speaking and writing the witnesses of revelation belong to revelation, if they spoke by the Spirit what they knew by the Spirit, and if we really have to hear them and therefore their words—then self-evidently we have to hear all their words with the same measure of respect . . . the inspiration of the Biblical witnesses . . . must be regarded quite definitely not merely as real but as verbal inspiration. But the question is whether it has not been . . . regarded as verbal inspiredness . . . which is itself no longer understood as grace but as a bit of higher nature . . . Paul . . . did not speak of verbal inspiredness . . .”

The tendency to center inspiration in the Scripture rather than in the authors and their readers suggests “a secret desire to evade the asserted mystery of this matter: that here a real human word is the real Word of God, the real humanity of it being more or less compromised by a foolish conception of its divinity. . . . That God himself says what his witnesses say, . . . is something that we often read in the Bible itself and quite patently: in itself it is the right expression for the mystery of its speech” (*ibid.*, p. 518). But Gregory the Great was wrong when he would not allow the apostles to be considered in any sense the authors of Scripture. Here the idea of dictation changes inspiration into a kind of Docetism. Even Augustine used phraseology which, if it was not intended docetically, can only be understood on the basis of the Jewish and heathen model of a mantically-mechanical operation. The same is the case with Athenagoras and several others who pictured the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration as that of a flute player playing his instrument.

At this point let us interrupt the summary of the excursus for a parenthetical remark about the flute and the flute player. Barth and others who dislike verbal inspiration take such illustrations as derogatory to the personal activity of the apostles in writing the Scriptures. Flutes are entirely passive under the hand and breath of the musi-

cian; therefore it seems to follow that the prophet or apostle is likewise as passive and mechanical as a flute. Now, in the first place, illustrations are always illustrations. They are intended to picture a point of similarity, though the illustrative material may be quite dissimilar in other respects. Since it is often difficult to select the point of similarity intended by the picturesque writer, illustrations often fail to illustrate and become sources of confusion. Then, in the second place, and with respect to flutes, it is not true that flutes contribute nothing to the music. Breath through a flute gives one sort of tone, and breath through a trumpet gives a quite different sort of tone. The "humanity" of the flute and the trumpet makes the difference. But the breath and the written notes are precisely the same. No doubt picturesque writers like Athenagoras and Hippolytus should not write so picturesquely; but neither should contemporary literally-minded objectors to verbal inspiration take them so literally.

Now, to return to the summary of the excursus, Barth sees in the flute illustration a "damping down the word of man as such by transmuting it into a word of man which is real only in appearance" by which "the whole mystery was lost, the mystery of the freedom of its presence both in the mouths of the Biblical witnesses and also in our ears and hearts" (p. 518). Worse, "the doctrines of inspiration of the Early Church were leading to a rather naive secularization of the whole concept of revelation" because "instead of being placed at once into the circle of the mystery which proceeds without a break from the revelation of the Triune God to the present illumination of our hearts" it was restricted to the Bible, the saints, and the teaching office of the Church. Thus the Church started on its journey to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Trent. In this secularization "even the doctrine of an objective inspiration of the Bible necessarily lost its meaning as one moment in the doctrine of the Word of God." Scripture became merely a phenomenon of history that could be studied and established neutrally, like any religious document.

The Reformers, says Barth, restored the authority and lordship of the Bible in the Church. Three points should be especially noted in their doctrine of inspiration. First, they took over unreservedly the verbal inspiration of the Bible, including the formula that God is its author, and even made use of the idea of dictation. But "in spite of the use of these concepts neither a mantico-mechanical nor a docetic conception of Biblical inspiration is in the actual sphere of Calvin's

thinking. Second, the Reformers saw that inspiration is not just any kind of miracle, "for it rests on the relationship of the Biblical witnesses to the very definite content of their witness. It is indeed this content which inspires them, i.e., which in their speaking and writing gives them a part in the Holy Spirit and therefore makes their writing Holy Scripture. . . . In this way the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible is restored as the doctrine of a divine mystery which we cannot grasp and which is therefore true and redemptive. For: *Deus incomprehensibilis*. Christ cannot be understood, *quia est Deus*. . . . No man . . . can know Christ fully in this life" (*ibid.*, p. 521). Then, third, the Reformers restored the context of inspiration. "As Luther insisted in innumerable passages the word of Scripture given by the Spirit can be recognized as God's Word only because the work of the Spirit which has taken place in it takes place again and goes a step further, i.e. becomes an event for its hearers or readers. . . . We cannot speak of the inspiration of the Bible without . . . that other royal act—which is only a continuation of the first—in which the inspiration is imparted to us" (*ibid.*, p. 522).

But, continues Barth, the post-Reformation period was one of decadence. The so-called orthodoxy of the eighteenth century first grew uncertain about sin and justification, misunderstood the idea of revelation, and opened itself to a direct inflow of natural theology. But, curiously enough, it stiffened its statements on the inspiration of the Bible. This combination, Barth insists, is not so queer as it seems, for the stricter doctrine of inspiration was "the most important way in which the great process of secularization on which post-Reformation Protestantism entered was carried through." The new doctrine "meant simply that the statement that the Bible is the Word of God was now transformed . . . from a statement about the free grace of God into a statement about the nature of the Bible as exposed to human inquiry brought under human control. The Bible as the Word of God surreptitiously became a part of natural knowledge of God" (*ibid.*, pp. 522-523). Instead of regarding God as the author of the Bible as the Reformers had done, these later theologians spoke of the apostles as amanuenses of God, flutes, living pens, and inspiration became dictation. Voetius extended inspiration to the Hebrew vowel points and "the Scriptures of the New Testament were inspired to their authors, not in the Aramaic or Syrian which was their native language, but in Hellenistic Greek. Even things which the Biblical

authors knew also by their own experience, reflection, and judgment, they did not write down on the basis of this human knowledge but on the basis of divine inspiration. In composing their writings they had no need of prior *studia, inquisitiones et praemeditationes*. . . . The sacred writers were not free to write down anything other—or in any other way than that dictated to them by the Holy Spirit . . . If we ask why all this had to be stated with this almost terrifying pedantry . . . we always come up against the postulate that Holy Scripture must be for us a *divina et infallibilis historia*. Truth is necessarily diffused over all Scripture and all parts of Scripture . . . Should there be found even the minutest error in the Bible, then it is not longer wholly the Word of God" (*ibid.*, p. 524).

Then Barth asserts that this seventeenth century doctrine of inspiration is new, not in its content, but in its intention. The content is merely a development of the doctrine of the Early Church. While the early doctrine "did not escape the danger of a docetic dissolving or of a mantico-mechanical materializing of the Biblical witness to revelation, it is obvious that the 'modern' seventeenth century doctrine of inspiration increased the danger with its development and systematization of the statements. But there is no point in trying to attack it from this side. We have seen from the example of the Reformers that the statements as such, if only they stand in the right context backwards and forwards, can be made without giving rise to that danger. . . . We must attack it because its supranaturalism is not radical enough. The intention behind it was ultimately only a single and in its own way very 'naturalistic' postulate: that the Bible must offer us a *divina et infallibilis historia*; that it must not contain human error in any of its verses; . . . that under the human words it must speak the Word of God to us in such a way that we can at once hear and read it as such with the same obviousness and directness with which we can hear and read other human words; that it must be a codex of axioms which can be seen with the same formal dignity as those of philosophy and mathematics. The secular nature of this postulate showed itself plainly in the assumption that we may freely reproach the good God if it is not fulfilled, threatening him with distrust, skepticism, and atheism—a threat which was no less freely carried out in the following generations, when men became convinced that the postulate could not be fulfilled" (*ibid.*, p. 525).

Concerning this long excursus on the doctrine of inspiration four

points must be made. First, Barth confuses the inspiration of the Bible with the inspiration of the prophets and apostles; second, he confounds the inspiration of the Scripture with the inspiration, really the illumination of the reader; third, he substitutes an historical development for a logical argument; and fourth, he refuses to accept the principle that God speaks the truth.

First, Barth confuses the inspiration of the Bible with what may in a certain sense be called the inspiration of the prophets and apostles. This charge of confusion is not intended to deny that holy men of God spake as they were moved or carried along by the Holy Ghost. In a sense the apostles were inspired. But inspiration, particularly as it is important for Christians of later ages, when the apostles are dead, is not exhausted in the apostles personally. Beyond the inspiration of the writers, the Bible speaks of itself, the Writings, as inspired. What was written, the words on the manuscript, were breathed out by God. It is this phase of inspiration, the phase most properly designated by the theological term, that Barth obscures. But the Bible puts more emphasis on the inspiration of the words than on the inspiration of the apostles and prophets.

Louis Gaussen, a Swiss theologian like Barth, but one whom Barth apparently does not mention, collected in his book *Theopneustia* the numerous Biblical references to the inspiration of the written words. The best known reference to the words as written is of course II Timothy 3:16; and Gaussen directs attention to the fact that it covers all the words, admits of no exception, and applies to "the thoughts after they have received the stamp of language." Some references do not specify written words, but nonetheless specify words. Gaussen lists instances of phrases such as, "The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it," "the Spirit of the Lord spake by me and his word was in my tongue," and "this Scripture [i.e., what is written] must needs be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas." Even more definitely, "I will put my words in his mouth . . . and whosoever will not hearken unto my words . . . I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:18); and "Jehovah said to me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. 1:9). Inspiration therefore terminates on the words: the Word of God is the words written in the Bible. Christ himself stresses the authority of the words. Sometimes his arguments against the rulers depend on a single word. At another time he said, "If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my

words?" Three times in reply to Satan he said, "It is written." Then in an all-inclusive statement he quoted Psalm 82 and supported its authority on the principle that "the Scripture cannot be broken." Obviously the Bible claims verbal inspiration for itself.¹

Barth, speaking of the interest of the Early Church in the inspiration of the spoken or written word as such, admits, "Now this point cannot . . . be regarded as unimportant"; but he claims that it is one-sided. His reason for this claim, however, is hardly applicable. Is it true that we cannot understand the inspiration of the prophets, or, better, the inspiration of the Bible, unless we keep equally before us that the readers need the work of the same Spirit if they are really to read it? Does it not seem, on the contrary, quite possible to understand that the Bible tells the truth without knowing that the readers of the Bible need the work of the same Spirit? But even if it does not seem so, it would be no reason for denying the verbal accuracy of all that is written. Even if interest in the words as such is one-sided, it is still one side of the Christian position. And this one side—properly called inspiration as distinct from the illumination of the readers—is the side without which illumination would be useless. What advantage could there be in being illumined as to the meaning of a verse, if the verse were false? Then, when Barth asserts that interest in verbal inspiration results in the acceptance of the Sibylline Oracles, he descends into the absurd. And again, if he ridicules verbal inspiration by calling it an attempt to make God's miracle "conceivable in its inconceivability," he equally exposes to the same ridicule his own phrase that the Bible is humanly fallible in its divine infallibility.

Second, Barth confounds the inspiration of the Scripture with the illumination of the reader. He commends Luther for insisting that the word of Scripture can be recognized as God's word only because the work of the Spirit which has taken place in it takes place again and becomes an event for its readers. This second work of the Spirit "is only a continuation of the first." Now, if this were so, the readers would soon be writing more Scripture; for since the first work of the Spirit, his work in the prophets, resulted in the writing of the Biblical books, a continuation of the same work would result in additional books of the Bible. Undeniably there is an illumination of some

¹ Barth once claims that the Bible "does not speak of itself" (I 2, p. 468). Can he really mean it?

readers of the Bible. By the testimony of the Spirit a man is convinced that the Scripture is in truth the Word of God; by the Spirit's illumination a believer may come to an understanding or a better understanding of this or that passage. Luther was right when he insisted that the Bible can be recognized as the Word of God only because of the work of the Spirit; but this is a totally different and distinct work. To recognize that the Bible is the Word of God is not to receive an additional Ten Commandments. Barth also quotes Calvin, *Institutes* I ix 3. But neither the quotation nor the chapter from which it is taken supports Barth's view. Calvin is discussing the testimony and illumination of the Spirit, not the inspiration of the Bible; and he gives no hint that this work in the believer is only a continuation of that in the prophets. Quite the reverse: the chapter is entitled, *The Fanaticism Which Discards the Scripture under the Pretense of Resorting to Immediate Revelations*. How better could Calvin deny that illumination is the same work as that which occurred in the inspiration of the Bible?

Now, third, a large section of Barth's argument against verbal inspiration is the account of an historical development, when logical implication is required for the conclusion. It is obviously true that after the apostle Paul had declared in favor of verbal inspiration, and after the Early Church had given it "one-sided" attention, that the Medieval Church fell into idolatry and eventually arrived at the Council of Trent. But to use such an historical development as an argument against verbal inspiration is the equivalent of blaming Jesus and his preaching for the crucifixion. No doubt the way he spoke and acted produced his death; but do we blame Jesus, or do we blame the Pharisees? Naturally sound doctrine leads to Satanic reaction, but this is not argument against the truth of the doctrine. Yet this is the type of Barth's argument, not only with respect to the Council of Trent, but also with the deterioration of Protestantism in the eighteenth century. That the century of Deism lost its sense of sin and justification and opened itself to natural theology is of course true. But this is not to say that verbal inspiration should be blamed, nor is it to say that those who accepted verbal inspiration and those who lost their sense of sin were the same persons. Orthodoxy may have "produced" secularism; but orthodoxy does not imply secularism. The Apostle teaches us that the Law produces, revives, and stimulates sin; yet the Law is holy, just, and good. To identify advo-

cacy of verbal inspiration as a process of secularization is therefore a suggestion without merit. And still less is it reasonable to suggest that verbal inspiration takes the contents of the Bible out of the sphere of revealed truth and puts it within the sphere of the natural knowledge of God. Barth in effect argues that because orthodoxy was followed by the Enlightenment and the subsequent "historical" investigation of the Bible, verbal inspiration is essentially a device for arriving at these results. *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

The fourth point to be made in reply to the excursus under discussion concerns the propriety of expecting God to tell the truth. Barth recognizes that this is the motivation behind the doctrine of verbal inspiration. "If we ask," he says, "why all this had to be stated with this almost terrifying pedantry and safeguarded against all possible defections, we always come up against the postulate that Holy Scripture must be for us a *divina et infallibilis historia*. . . . Should there be found even the minutest error in the Bible, then it is no longer wholly the word of God, and the inviolability of its authority is destroyed" (I 2, p. 524).

But why should the doctrine of inspiration be terrifying, and why should it be called pedantry? Barth himself does not always avoid a certain amount of "pedantry." In his desire to rule out all natural theology and safeguard his theory against all possible defections, he argues that there is not the minutest trace of it in the Bible (II 1, pp. 105-110); and he meticulously explains or explains away the so-called nature Psalms and passages like the first chapter of Romans. This minute analysis is not to be decried. On the contrary, we acknowledge indebtedness to Barth for so carefully working out his theory to this detailed extent. So too there is nothing blameworthy or terrifying in explaining verbal inspiration as carefully as possible.

Unfortunately, we admit, some of the advocates of verbal inspiration were not careful enough and their details are sometimes mistaken. Did Gregory the Great really deny that the apostles "weigh at all as the authors of it?" Maybe the context in Gregory would soften Barth's "at all." Yet Voetius' and Polanus' extension of inspiration to the Massoretic vowel points is admittedly a mistake. The Scriptures, the Writing, did not have vowel points, and no Scriptural claim to inspiration can be stretched to cover what the prophets did not write. This is a mistake of Voetius and Polanus, but it is not a good objection to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Barth also con-

demns Voetius' assertion that the prophets and apostles had no need of prior *studia*. If by this Voetius meant that Luke as a matter of fact did not make investigations, he contradicts Luke's own testimony; but if he meant that investigating does not produce revelation or if he meant that revelation, such as predictive prophecy and doctrinal explanation, can and does come to a prophet altogether apart from investigation, he has said nothing objectionable. Barth himself insists that the Biblical witness "is not a kind of logically developed human doctrine" (II 1, p. 105); "what is our conception of a prophet or apostle if we believe . . . he will dare to incorporate into his proclamation . . . statements which he derives from some other source" (p. 109); and insofar as the context excludes all non-revelational sources, Barth undermines his objection to verbal inspiration.

Whatever mistakes Gregory and Voetius may have made, it is neither a mistake nor pedantry to remark that the New Testament was inspired in Greek and not in Aramaic. Inspiration terminates on what was written, and this was Greek. Nor should one be offended at the statement "Even things which the Biblical authors knew also by their own experience, reflection, and judgment, they did not write down on the basis of this human knowledge, but on the basis of divine inspiration" (I 2, p. 524). The evangelists and the writers of the epistles doubtless had a great amount of "human knowledge"; they knew many things, even many relevant things that they did not write down. What is wrong then with saying that God inspired them in their choice of what to write? Why does Barth use it as an objection that "the sacred writers were not free to write down anything other"? For anyone who holds to divine sovereignty, predestination, and foreordination, for one who holds that God works all things after the counsel of his own will, i.e., for a Reformed theologian such an appeal to human freedom is nugatory. It must be regretfully maintained that Barth is not at his best in this argument. Terms such as Docetism, manticism, and mechanical express Barth's disapprobation, but they do not establish his conclusions.

Barth's opposition to verbal inspiration is the less understandable in view of several of his own pointed remarks. "Gregory Nazianzus writes that every slightest line and stroke of Scripture is due to the minute care of the Spirit and that even the slenderest nuance of the writers is not in vain or displayed to us in vain. Here too, in the light of Matthew 5:17f. we must be on our guard against trying to say

anything different. If . . . the witnesses of revelation . . . spoke by the Spirit what they knew by the Spirit, and if we really have to hear them and therefore their words—then self-evidently we have to hear all their words with the same measure of respect. It would be arbitrary to relate their inspiration only to such parts of their witness as perhaps appear important to us, or not to their words as such but only to the views and thought which evoke them" (I 2, pp. 517-518). And a third of a page below, "God himself says what his witnesses say." Now is not this verbal inspiration with almost as much pedantry as found in Voetius? The views and thoughts of the prophets are not enough; we must accept their very words. Nor dare we limit ourselves to such of their words that happen to please us; we must hear all their words, and hear them all with the same measure of respect. Even the slightest line and slenderest nuance, every jot and title, are under the care of the Spirit; and whatever else the writers may have known in general, they spoke by the Spirit what they knew by the Spirit—including the reference to Paul's cloak in Troas which Barth objects to on a later page. Does not Barth in these phrases accept the orthodox doctrine of plenary and verbal inspiration? No, there is one difference. The orthodox doctrine holds that God speaks the truth. Barth's doctrine has all the minutiae, all the "pedantry," but without the one all-important result. Every word and every line is under the Spirit's care, but this does not mean for Barth that what was written was all true. One wonders then how a rational man can give the same measure of respect to the true statements, e.g., the Trinity and the Virgin Birth, and to the false statements of number mysticism. In this connection also we consider it unfortunate that Barth claims to accept "verbal inspiration," while rejecting only "verbal inspiredness" (*ibid.*, p. 518). This is nothing more than a play on words that obscures the historical meaning of the doctrine.

Barth makes the peculiar charge that the orthodox doctrine is secular, naturalistic, deficient in mystery and supernaturalism (*ibid.*, p. 525). Barth's theory of inspiration is unquestionably a mystery. He speaks of the union of human fallibility and divine infallibility. Or, to put it more sharply, Barth's mystery centers in the question how false statements can really be the Word of God. Whether or not he wishes to cover over this mystery with the incomprehensibility of God is not entirely clear. At any rate he states that the doctrine of inspiration is a mystery which we cannot grasp, for God is incompre-

hensible and Christ cannot be understood. "No man, be he apostle or prophet, much less I or those like me, can know Christ fully in this life" (*ibid.*, p. 521). Now, of course, no one in this life can fully understand God; and therefore no one can fully understand inspiration. But if this appeal to incomprehensibility is intended to cover over Barth's theory of inspiration, it is misplaced. To admit that we cannot know fully, to admit that we are not omniscient, does not imply that we are totally ignorant. Though we do not know everything, God has revealed some things, among which is the principle that he is the truth and cannot tell lies. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with Barth that God should speak the truth? There is mystery and supernaturalism enough in God's putting true words in Moses' mouth; we do not need the mystery of God's authoring fanciful number mysticism.

Barth even goes the length of charging the orthodox with impiety. The secularism of verbal inspiration is seen, he says, in the assumption that we may freely reproach the good God, threatening him with distrust, skepticism, and atheism, if his Word proves erroneous. But Barth has altered the terms of the threat, and the threat was itself instituted by God: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously" (Deut. 18:22). God himself therefore permits and demands that we test prophets by the truth of what they say; if they do not speak the truth, they are not the Lord's prophets. This does not make the Bible a "paper Pope," but a reliable revelation. The phraseology about the Word of God actualizing itself by its own decision and act, about our part being only recollection and expectation, for otherwise the Bible would no longer be a free and spiritual force but an instrument of human power (p. 525), is a singularly inept defense of falsehood in the Bible. The logic of the Enlightenment is unimpeachable: if the Bible is untrue, it cannot be the Word of God. Would that modern theologians attacked the premise instead of the logic.

So strained is Barth's defense of an erroneous Word of God that one cannot help wondering what hypothesis might explain it. Let us suggest that Barth operates on two axioms. First, he accepts the Bible as the Word of God in some sense or other. We do not question the sincerity of his adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity and the his-

toricity of the Virgin Birth. A considerable part of the Christian gospel has gripped him. But he is also thoroughly convinced that there are numerous mistakes in the Bible. "The seventeenth century doctrine of inspiration asserted things which cannot be maintained . . . in face of an honest appreciation of the facts of its origin and tradition" (*ibid.*, p. 526). To be sure he lightly allows that the destructive criticism of the Bible "is always debatable," but he is not over-anxious to debate it.

Would it not be the policy of wisdom, however, to accept the onus of this debate? Of course Barth himself cannot engage in archaeological expeditions or spend his time in historical criticism. Yet, as a theologian he can appeal to new developments in these fields instead of taking for granted the documentary theories of Wellhausen, the *formgeschichtlich* method of Dibelius and Bultmann, or some other type of destructive criticism. Why is Barth unwilling to annul the results of the negative scholarship of the last century? (I 2, p. 494). The critics used to claim that there never had been a nation of Hittites; they used to say that there were no camels in Egypt at the time of Abraham. Now, the Hittite language is known, and camels have been admitted to Egypt, though one notable archaeologist maintains that they were not then domesticated. One may recall the sarcasm Nietzsche was able to develop on the basis of his ignorance of the existence of Koiné Greek. And how long would it take to list the errors in the Bible that have now been discovered to be the errors of the destructive critics? Yet Barth, in spite of his occasional discounting of nineteenth century science, seems to take its conclusions as fixed. But the axiom that the Bible is the Word of the God of Truth and the axiom that the Bible contains errors are incompatible. With these two as a basis then, what deductions are possible other than self-contradictions obscured in the fog of mystery?

The contradiction between these two axioms can be avoided only by dropping one of them. If the Bible contains errors, then the Enlightenment was right in denying that it is the Word of God in any other sense than that in which the Sibylline Oracles, Augustine's Confessions, and Aesop's Fables may be called the Word of God. But if the Scriptures are God-breathed, then several things Barth complains about must be accepted: "that it must not contain human error in any of its verses; that in all its parts and the totality of its words and letters as they are before us [better, as the prophets wrote

them] it must express divine truth in a form in which it can be established [?] and understood; that under [in or by] the human word it must speak to us the Word of God in such a way that we can at once hear and read it as such with the same obviousness and directness with which we can hear and read other human words" (p. 525). These points, which Barth dislikes, we must accept. Barth's other stipulation, however, is expressed too strictly: "that it must be a codex of axioms which can be seen as such with the same formal dignity as those of philosophy and mathematics." Axiomatization, as has been argued, is the ideal of theology, not the form of the Bible. Barth's two axioms then, being inconsistent with each other, cannot be combined in any rational view. One must be chosen and the other left behind.

A Functioning Christianity

These four points of criticism on this important excursus have of necessity become somewhat comprehensive and fundamental. They begin to take on the appearance of a conclusion. Indeed the conclusion is almost upon us. Only one more criticism of the technical working out of Barth's principles will be given, and then a final paragraph.

This one last point of criticism deals with a difficulty in Barth's construction, which if not entirely overlooked receives a treatment that neither Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, nor Baptists can approve of. It has to do with the functioning of the Church both in the conduct of its regular worship and in the legal aspects of its government. Not only must a church have an elementary message to preach to unbelievers, a definition of sin, a plan of salvation, and other major creedal articles, but it must also decide who should be baptized and how baptism should be administered. It must, simply in order to function, decide what organizational principles to use in its business sessions. And there are questions of ordination. Should there be three orders of clergy or one only? Are ministers to be appointed by the State or elected by the congregations? Such and many others are the problems that have plagued the history of the Church. They are unavoidable problems. Does Barth have a method for their solution?

Barth indeed gives an answer to these questions, though it is debat-

able whether he has a method, a satisfactory method for solving them. Contrary to the tenor of Church history he suggests that these matters be arranged on the simple basis of personal preference and organizational expediency. Always stressing that the Bible should be heard in the Church, Barth denies that the Bible can be heard as "the book of the law of the Church's faith and order . . . It is not a pre-script either for doctrine or for life." Whether the government of the Church is "a monarchical or an aristocratic or a democratic form of constitution is a question which . . . is only secondary . . . And it is difficult to claim that any one of these forms . . . is based on the Bible . . . His [Christ's] community may prefer this or that form . . ." (IV 1, 723). The preference no doubt is to be made in submission to the Lord, but it is a vague submission to a wordless Lord. "It is concretely to Scripture that the community has to listen in the question of law and order, in conflict against [Brunner's] ecclesiastical lawlessness and disorder. It has to receive direction from the Bible . . . His [Christ's] activity there and then is the law which the community must obey here and now . . . The Church has not, then, merely to copy and adopt and imitate that which in response to his direction was achieved there and then, and may be seen in Scripture . . . We can never handle the Bible in this way . . . There can be no question of its [the Church's] obeying any given form of the body of Jesus Christ—not even the Biblical—but only Jesus Christ himself as Head of his body" (IV 2, p. 683). But if the Bible does not give directions as to organization, ordination, baptism, and so on, where can they be obtained? The wordless Christ, in this case, becomes identical with personal preference and organizational expediency.

The Westminster Confession, which makes a very positive claim that one of these forms is based on the Bible, allows a certain area for the application of expediency. "There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church, *common to human actions and societies*, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence" (I vi). But Barth goes beyond circumstances common to all human societies and relegates to expediency both the basic constitutional principles and the definite acts of worship. "No Church order is perfect, for none has fallen directly from heaven and none is identical with the basic law of the Christian community. Even the orders of the primitive New Testament community (whatever form they took) were not perfect, nor

are those of the Western Papacy, the Eastern Patriarchate, the Synodal Presbyterianism which derives from Calvin's system, Anglican, Methodist, Neo-Lutheran and other forms of Episcopacy, or Congregationalism with its sovereignty of the individual community . . . At one time they may all have been living law . . . and therefore legitimate forms of the body of Christ. Indeed they may be this still" (IV 2, p. 718). Obviously the wordless Christ has nothing to say about papal, presbyterial, or congregational forms of government.

Nor is it only the narrowly legal and governmental affairs of the Church which Barth abandons to preference. He includes baptism also. "What are the conditions for the reception of baptism and therefore acceptance into the community . . . Who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper and who is not to be admitted, or not yet or no longer to be admitted? . . . Finally, how and by whom is Christian worship as a whole to be shaped and fashioned . . . ? All these questions can be gathered up in the one question how the community thinks that itself and its members are brought under discipline by its Lord at this center of its life . . ." (IV 2, p. 710).

None of this alleviates the previous difficulties, mentioned in Chapter III, relative to the nature of the Church and its relation to the outside world. Apparently the rite of baptism, no matter how any organization prefers to administer it, makes it a Church and authorizes its laws. "We have seen that the confidence which each can and should have in respect of all others and himself rests on the permission and command received by members in their baptism. But all the propositions of canon law rest on this confidence. . . . Again, in the community there is trust that the propositions sought and found in this way will have sufficient authority for each and all to claim acceptance and respect. . . . This means that the competence of Church law . . . can be reached only in the confidence that the few or the many are authorized in virtue of their baptism" (IV 2, p. 707). But if all this is so, must we not conclude that Kierkegaard had no reason to complain about the stagnation of the State Church of Denmark and that in Germany Lessing and Feuerbach were members of the body of Christ? Such a Church, or, rather, such an organization can function; but is it really a Church?

Of course Barth wants a true Christian Church; and he clearly believes he is describing it. He cannot mean that baptism authorizes canon laws that would turn the Lord's Supper into a Canaanitish

fertility orgy. He wants the Church to be subject to Christ, to the Christ "attested in the Bible." But the link between Christ and the Bible, and the link between the Bible and the Church are both fragile.

First, let us consider the link between Christ and the Bible, between the Word and the words. For all of Barth's identification of the Word of God with the Scripture, there is also a nebulous "revelation" behind the Scripture. It is only because of this revelation that the Bible, partially, at certain times, in certain events, becomes the Word of God. Inasmuch as the Bible is verbal, the underlying revelation, to escape the anti-faith reason and language of men, must be other than verbal. In one place revelation is equated with reconciliation (I 1, p. 468). Now, if revelation is non-verbal, how is it possible to derive from it the information that is necessary for the conduct of the life of a church?

If revelation is non-verbal, it would seem that no method is possible. Suppose that revelation consisted in a bright light from heaven, apart from the voice of direction, or an electric shock such as Barth once mentioned, or a strange warmth about the heart, what would or could this mean in reference to the questions just listed? And without these questions or similar ones being answered there could be no church organization, no church services, no evangelistic endeavor, no intelligible religion at all.

But of course in many places Barth has insisted, strongly insisted on the words of Scripture; he makes no profession of a wordless religion. Look at his thick volumes! Yet, for all of that, it is still not completely clear that he can escape this type of objection. Scripture, in Barth's construction, really is not the Word of God, no matter how many times he says it is; on his own showing Scripture only becomes the Word of God upon certain occasions, and not all Scripture at that. This becoming is effected by some mysterious event of revelation, and it is far from clear that this event is a case of God's speaking words and men's hearing them. The words which become the Word of God in this event are the words of the prophets and apostles; they are not some other words spoken in 1517 or 1934 for the first time. But if revelation is a wordless event, how does one pass from the wordless event, which if alone would leave religion unintelligible, to all the word of this Law and the Scripture that can-

not be broken?¹ It is not only the man of today who would find difficulty in organizing a Church program, it is the prophets and the apostles themselves who would be perplexed in translating "revelation" into Scripture. If intelligible religion, or better, if Christianity must begin with words, then let it begin with the words of Scripture, neither more nor less, true and not false; but if Christianity, or, better, if unintelligible religion does not begin with words, how can it later attach itself to one set of words rather than to another, or to any words at all?

If, however, some implausible connection can be devised to close the gap between "revelation" and the Scripture, i.e., between the wordless Christ and the Bible, the link between the Bible and the Church is also fragile. The criticisms apply with equal force to Barth's treatment of the Scripture itself.

Barth has professed a great attachment to the Scripture. Christianity is the religion of the Bible, not an independent study of anthropology or history. In addition to these general dogmatic considerations, Barth's reliance on the Scripture can quickly be estimated by glancing at the list of references in his Indexes. Furthermore, in spite of his acceptance of a fair amount of radical criticism, he seems sincerely to believe many more Biblical propositions, pieces of information, and no doubt precepts also, than other members of his "school" do. But he does not believe all the Bible. Rather he says we must accept its "main statements." Now, even though he recognizes a greater proportion of the Biblical content to be "main statement" than some others do, yet he sees fit to reject certain parts. This of course implies that while Barth believes 'the Word became flesh,' he does not believe 'the Scripture cannot be broken.'

Or take another example. In addition to 'the Word became flesh' and statements of the Virgin Birth, Barth accepts Colossians 1:19-20, "It pleased the Father . . . by him to reconcile all things unto himself." This passage he interprets in favor of universal salvation (H.G. pp. 61-62). Barth shows both a little caution and even a little irritation at the mention of universalism. Now, there is no wish to misrepresent him; and if definite statements could be discovered in Barth to the effect that some people are eternally lost and will never enter

¹ Maybe all Christianity is an "enormous fiction." "How do we know that there is anything at all corresponding to what we have in these formulations?" Barth asks these questions, but his answer "is not the fundamentalist one which would have it that the sacred text as such is the proper and final basis of knowledge" (IV 2, pp. 118-119).

heaven, but suffer always in hell, the doubtful passages might clumsily be fitted in somehow. But in the absence of such definite affirmations of eternal punishment, there is enough in Barth to show a strong tendency toward universal salvation. "How can there be," he asks, "forgiveness without judgment, or judgment without forgiveness?" (II 1, p. 360). Eternal punishment would be judgment without forgiveness, so that this passage seems to imply universalism. Or, again, the Church "is the place of revelation, of mercy and peace, Mount Zion which the heathen are on their way to, whether they know and desire it or not" (I 1, p. 177). And again, the Church "must now leave to this Word . . . to move the boundaries between the Church and that which is not the Church nearer or further away, and eventually, when God will be all in all, to remove them completely" (I 2, p. 686). Other passages, perhaps not quite so definite, yet tending in the same direction are I 2, pp. 109-112, 299 and II 1, pp. 379, 391. Now, aside from the fact that universal salvation removes the urgency of preaching the Gospel and diminishes the seriousness of a Christian life, or, rather, diminishes the seriousness of a non-Christian life, the acceptance of certain Biblical passages in a universalistic sense entails the rejection of the clear passages on the reality of hell. It would follow therefore that if Colossians 1:20 is a "main" passage to be accepted, Mark 9:43, 46, 48 is not a main passage and is to be rejected. Barth therefore accepts one verse and rejects another.

Now, suppose for the sake of argument, as Barth himself has insisted, that two verses contradict each other. Colossians and Mark cannot both be true. The first question then is, not which one we should accept, but on what principle should we decide which is true and which is false? Barth raises some such question as this, but not too clearly; and the answer is still less clear: "If we want to think of the Bible as a real witness of divine revelation, then clearly we have to keep two things constantly before us and give them their due weight: the limitation and the positive element, its distinctiveness from revelation, in so far as it is only a human word about it, and its unity with it, in so far as revelation is the basis, object, and content of this word" (I 2, p. 463). On this page Barth sharply distinguishes between the Bible and revelation. "We distinguish the Bible as such from revelation. A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses." Once again therefore, if revelation is wordless

how can one determine from revelation which of two incompatible verses to select? How can one assess the Bible's unity with revelation in so far as revelation is the basis, object, and content of this word? Is revelation in the words of Colossians or of Mark?

The same problem also arose earlier in this chapter with reference to the list of Biblical miracles. Barth was willing to accept some miracles, but he did not wish to place "blind credence in all the miracle stories related in the Bible . . . It is really not laid upon us to take everything in the Bible as true *in globo*." On this earlier page the point of the quotation was simply to document Barth's refusal to accept the whole Bible. Here the question is, How does one decide what to believe and what not to believe? Whether we are faced with mutually contradictory verses or with credible and incredible narratives, a principle of distinction is necessary.

The type of principle required is perfectly clear. The only way in which a decision can be reached in these choices lies in the use of some non-scriptural principle. Biblical norms are impossible. Since both verses or both narratives are equally in the Bible, obviously it is not by their being in the Bible that they can be judged. Nor can an appeal be made to some other verse in the Bible, for it too may have its contradictory and will itself need to be judged on the basis of some independent principle.

Therefore a theologian must choose one of three positions. He may mystically take the irrational position of accepting contradictions. In this case it does not matter whether he believes the Bible or not, for he always contradicts himself. Now, in spite of Barth's initial hesitancy about the law of contradiction as a norm of science, no critic can believe that Barth intends to be irrational. There may be vestigial remains of Paradox and the Totally Other, and these may be evaluated as flaws, even serious flaws, in his thought; but he has also laid great stress on rational communication.

The second position is that of the Protestant Reformers. Verbal inspiration may face problems in exegeting Mark and Colossians, it may have to substitute a Christian philosophy of science for naturalistic humanism, and it must dispose of Wellhausen and his documentary hypothesis; but the entanglements and confusions of contemporary theology in its attempt to be both contemporary and Christian hold no terrors, hold no perplexities, for the orthodox system.

If, now, one rejects the infallible authority of the Scriptures, the third position alone remains. This position is the acceptance, as a norm or canon, of something or other external to the Bible. Mark and Colossians must be measured against an independent principle. Since this external norm cannot be a wordless revelation, for a wordless revelation cannot give us the necessary information, it must be secular science, history, or anthropology. Of course, this is what Barth had vehemently objected to in his attack on modernism. A norm or canon other than Scripture is something Barth does not want at all. But the construction of his system has not enabled him to escape it. The result is that Barth's theology is self-contradictory. He operates on the basis of incompatible axioms, and against his hopes and aims arrives at an untenable or irrational position.

Of these three positions only that of verbal inspiration survives critical analysis. With contemporary misapprehensions about mantic mechanism and Voetius' exaggerations on Hebrew vowel points set aside, the converse of this long critique directed against Barth is that without verbal revelation a religion cannot be both Biblical and rational. There is no Christianity without verbal inspiration because Christianity is rational and rationality requires verbal inspiration.

Christianity is rational because the God who made the Bible his revelation declares that he is a rational Being of wisdom and understanding. He created man in his own rational image; and these two rationalities, if they are to communicate at all, must because of their nature communicate intelligibly. Undoubtedly there exist religions of emotion and mysticism, non-Christian religions they are; but let them remain silent, for they have nothing to say, and any noise they make conveys no message. There are also devout but confused minds who, combining elements of different sorts, are inconsistent in their beliefs. Such minds, however refined and agreeable they may be personally, should either hate the one and love the other, or else hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and unintelligibility.

Christianity is rational and rationality requires verbal inspiration. When God, the rational God, speaks to his rational creatures, he must, we insist, speak the truth. His word cannot be false. Barth has tried to ridicule this requirement, as if it gave man some sort of control over God. The shoe is on the other foot. Notions of God and practices of religion are subjected more easily to critical manipula-

tion, once Scriptural authority is sacrificed. To insist that God's words cannot be false, even to the jot and tittle, gives man no control over God; it is merely the expression of God's nature and man's need. No rational ground whatever can support the proposition that God speaks falsities. Of course, a man of the Enlightenment, denying that God spoke the Bible, might construct a religion of human invention; but the Bible claims that its words are God's true words, so that no theologian can be both Biblical and rational if he rejects verbal inspiration.

The school to which Barth belongs, or at least the movement which Barth initiated, has a heritage of irrationalism. Barth himself is probably the least irrational of them all. Yet even Barth, in his great enthusiasm to proclaim the good news that the Word became flesh, tends to forget that what became flesh and spoke in human language was the Word, the Logos, the infallible Reason of God.

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